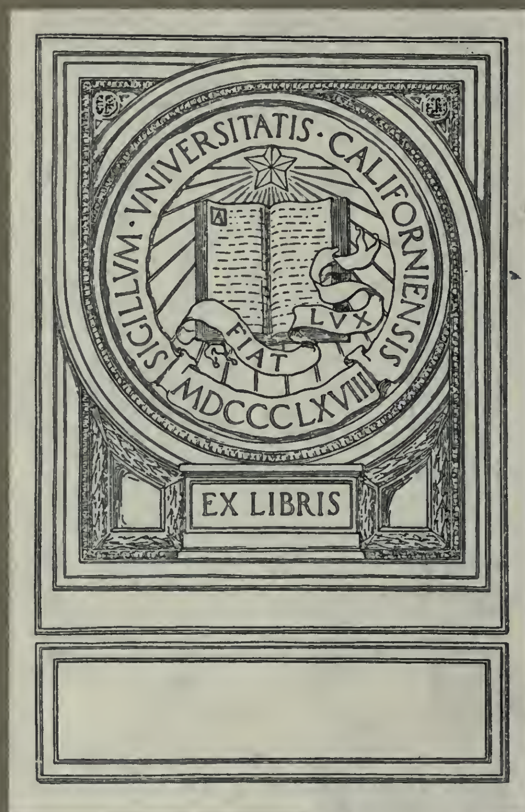

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THE IDEALS OF INDIAN ART







PARVATI DANCING: SCULPTURE FROM THE KURUVATTI TEMPLE

Frontispiece

THE IDEALS OF INDIAN ART

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER VIII

PART II

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES XVIII—XXXII

ILLUSTRATIONS



INTRODUCTION

In the present volume I have attempted to fill up some of the particulars, unavoidably omitted from my book on Indian Sculpture and Painting, which are necessary for the full appreciation of the Indian æsthetic standpoint.

Convinced as I am that the learning of the orientalist, however profound and scientific it may be, is often most misleading in æsthetic criticism, it has been always my first endeavour, in the interpretation of Indian ideals, to obtain a direct insight into the artist's meaning without relying on modern archæological conclusions and without searching for the clue which may be found in Indian literature. I started with the premise that the Buddhist divine ideal, of which the great statue of Buddha at Anuradhapura is the type, was not, as archæologists have generally assumed, a debased imitation of a Græco-Roman model, deficient in technical achievement for lack of anatomical knowledge, but an imaginative creation, purely Indian in origin, derived from the teaching of Indian Yoga philosophy which was adopted by

Mahâyâna Buddhism. I would maintain that no critic who begins with this archæological prepossession is capable of appreciating the beauty of Indian sculpture and painting, or competent to interpret the intentions of Indian artists.

In the present work I bring forward evidence from Indian literature which entirely justifies my conclusions and explains more fully the origin of the Buddhist and Jain divine ideal and its derivation from the old Aryan heroic ideal as described in Indian epic poetry. The light which the Mahâbhârata throws on this point is important, for it shows the affinity of Indian æsthetic ideals with Egyptian, Cretan, and pre-Pheidian Hellenic art, a matter of the deepest interest to students of archæology.

I have also endeavoured to indicate the inspiration of Vedic thought, which still permeates the whole atmosphere of Indian life, as the originating impulse of Indian art and the influence which links together all its different historic phases, not excepting the Mogul period; but I differ entirely from the European critic whose usual attitude is to point to the Vedic and early Buddhist period as containing all that is pure and spiritual in Indian thought, and to explain the succeeding Buddhist-Hindu epoch, until the advent of Islam, as a gradual relapse into superstition and barbarism. This error is, I think, largely due to ignorance or misapprehension of Hindu artistic

ideals, which also leads Western critics to disregard the paramount importance of Indian idealism, not only in Mogul art, but in the great schools of China and Japan.

I am aware that in some cases the interpretation I have given to Hindu symbolism may seem to lack the authority of Sanskrit texts; but art and literature do not always follow parallel lines, and the archæologists who have sought to interpret Indian art only by literary knowledge have often gone woefully astray. Anglo-India needs more art in its archæology and less archæology in its art.

Though in my excursions into the new world of art which India has revealed to me I have acquired an intense admiration for the great monuments of the past, my interest in Indian art is not of an academic or archæological kind. It is centred in the fact that Indian art is still a living thing with vast potentialities, of such unique value to India and all the world that it should be regarded as a great national trust which Great Britain is bound in honour and duty to guard and maintain. If to the orthodox critic my enthusiasm may seem to be excessive, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is shared by a goodly company of my fellow artists; and the fault, if fault there be, is a venial one. Art does not die of overpraise; it cannot live or thrive in an atmosphere of contempt and depreciation. The half-hearted admirers of Indian art are those who do it most injury.

It is not a small matter, either for this country or for India, that Indian artistic ideals are so misunderstood and misinterpreted. For if a great national art affords a revelation of national thought and character more intimate, more complete and universal, than history, poetry, or romance can give us, the misapprehension or depreciation of its ideals by an alien governing race must inevitably sow intellectual antipathies, not less dangerous because they are often unconscious ones, which aggravate racial prejudices, create obstacles to that intimate social relationship without which a perfect understanding between different races is impossible, and are detrimental to good administration, especially in the vital problems of education. The mistakes engendered by such misunderstanding should be evident enough in the injury which has been done to Indian art, even in the efforts which have been made to assist it.

It would be regarded as silly and inconsequent if a critic were to complain of the sculptors of the Sphinx that they knew not how to draw or model cats and dogs. Western methods of art-teaching in India, based on the assumption that Indian artists have been always ignorant of anatomy and perspective, are not less irrelevant and uninformed.

The nation which governs India should not allow its state museums to lend themselves to the depreciation of Indian art in all its higher aspects. I am convinced that, with the spread of better

knowledge, the whole consensus of artistic opinion in Europe will condemn such statements as those which appear in the official handbook to the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum; which reveal, also, the guiding principle in the whole past administration of it:

"The monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown, as fine arts, in India. . . . Nowhere does their figure-sculpture show the inspiration of true art. They seem to have no feeling for it. . . . How completely their figure-sculpture fails in true art is seen at once when they attempt to produce it on a natural or heroic scale; and it is only because their ivory and stone figures of men and animals are on so minute a scale that they excite admiration."

It is easy to understand, when such ideas are given authoritative official sanction in the state collections which are designed for public enlightenment, why many sound English art-critics are full of similar prejudices, and why Indian art is generally better appreciated on the Continent than it is in this country. I hope that the selection of some of the finest examples of Indian sculpture which I have made to illustrate this book, together with those given in the previous one on the same subject, will go far to correct the false impression of Indian art which all our national collections

create, and indicate the direction in which the latter may be improved.

But as the best illustrations are always poor substitutes for the originals, I hope also that they will inspire more art-students, Indian as well as European, to go and seek the truth for themselves in the places where Indian art can be properly appreciated. They will then realise fully what a mangled and distorted version of it has hitherto been presented to the Western art-world.

It is difficult to argue with those who are so steeped in Western academic prejudices as to treat all Hindu art as puerile and detestable because it has chosen the most simple and obvious forms of symbolism, such as a third eye to denote spiritual consciousness—where the classical scholar would expect a Greek nymph, or a Roman Sybil, with an explanatory label—a multiplicity of arms to denote the universal attributes of divinity, and a lion-like body in gods and heroes to express spiritual and physical strength. Such critics seem not to appreciate the fact that Hindu art was not addressed, like modern Western art, to a narrow coterie of *literati* for their pleasure and distraction. Its intention was to make the central ideas of Hindu religion and philosophy intelligible to all Hinduism, to satisfy the unlettered but not unlearned Hindu peasant as well as the intellectual Brahmin. It does not come within the province of a critic to dictate to the artist what symbols he may or may

not employ—to tell him that it is true art to use *x*, *y*, and *z* in his æsthetic notation, but not *a*, *b*, and *c*; or *vice versâ*.

In all great national art the artist invariably prefers the symbols which make the most universal appeal—those which are best understood by the people he addresses. He can only be rightly condemned if in the application of them he should offend against the universal laws of æsthetic design and rhythm. Hindu symbolism is justified because it speaks straight to the heart of Hinduism and because it is used with consummate artistic knowledge and skill.

That Hindu art was successful in its educational purpose may be inferred from the fact, known to all who have intimate acquaintance with Indian life, that the Indian peasantry, though illiterate in the Western sense, are among the most cultured of their class anywhere in the world. A very competent and independent European witness, Dr. Lefroy, Bishop of Lahore, has testified from his long personal experience to the extraordinary aptitude with which even the poorest and wholly illiterate Hindu peasant will engage in discussion of or speculation in the deepest philosophical and ethical questions. It is just because art has penetrated so deeply into national life in India that it demands the most careful and sympathetic study of every one of the governing class, whether he be artist or layman. In this respect, also, Indian art is a most

valuable object-lesson to Europe; for the rehabilitation of art, music, and the drama on a national basis is one of the great needs of Western civilisation.

Let the classical scholar by all means indulge his personal predilections privately, but those who hold Indian art up to ridicule and contempt are only condemning themselves as wholly unfit to control the policy of our state museums or to direct art-education in India.

I must render acknowledgments for assistance I have received first to my wife, whose keen artistic intuition and sound judgment have been very helpful in the analysis of the examples chosen for illustration. To Mr. F. W. Thomas, Librarian of the India Office, and Mr. Abanindro Nath Tagore, Vice-Principal of the Calcutta School of Art, I am indebted for advice and ready help in my search for literary references. I am also very grateful for the help I have received in obtaining photographs from Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy; the Director of the Colombo Museum; Dr. Henderson, Superintendent of the Madras Museum; Mr. J. de LaValette; Mr. J. H. Marshall, C.I.E., Director-General of the Archæological Survey of India; Mr. T. Oppermann, Director of the Glyptotek, Copenhagen; Mr. Edgar Thurston, C.I.E.; Mr. M. Veluyathan Asari, Assistant-Superintendent, School of Arts, Madras; Messrs. Johnston & Hoffman, of Calcutta, and Messrs. Nicholas & Co., of Madras.

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PART I

THE IDEALS OF INDIAN ART

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF INDIAN ART—THE VEDIC PERIOD

Undoubtedly the most significant fact in modern Western art is that artists, dimly conscious of the limitations which the narrow conventions of the Italian Renaissance have so long imposed upon them, have been looking for many years once more to the East for new ideas and new sources of inspiration. It is still more significant of the gulf which separates Eastern thought from Western, that in this quest British artists have not turned at once to India as the primal source from which the main current of Eastern idealism has always flowed towards Europe, but to China and Japan, which during the greatest periods of their art-history were themselves dominated by the influence of that same mighty Indian thought-stream.

The distinguished Japanese art-critic, Mr. Okakura, author of "The Ideals of the East," has rightly insisted that, in the domain of art-philosophy, all Asia is one. But if we apply Western analytical methods to the exegesis of Asiatic æsthetics, we shall never form any just or complete

conception of them until we have learnt to discard all our Western academic prejudices, and realised the paramount importance of Indian philosophy and religion among the great creative forces which moulded Asiatic art.

Personally, I think that the scientific analysis of the Western art-historian is often very misleading. What art needs now, both in the East and in the West, is not analysis, but synthesis; not a dissection of styles, methods, and principles, nor the determination of art-values by the Röntgen rays and the microscope, but a clear understanding of the great psychic currents and intellectual movements which have created the great art-schools in different epochs and different countries; and, above all, a clearer conception of the art-philosophy upon which these schools were founded.

In this country especially, where philosophy is commonly held to have no practical bearing on life and policy, all our methods of art-teaching, since the sixteenth century, have become almost entirely empirical and unscientific in the true sense of the word. On the one hand, the puritanical sentiment of the Reformation has tended to divorce art from religion; and, on the other hand, our universities have uprooted the idealism of the Middle Ages, and substituted for the art-philosophy of Christianity an academic formula of their own devising, the influence of which has joined with modern materialism in destroying all our great national art traditions.

Under the tyranny of this clerical and literary domination art has lost its power and influence in national education and dwindled into a special cult for a small and exclusive sect, whose dogmas are expounded by classical professors, whose places of worship are museums, picture-galleries, and exhibitions, and whose idols are the gods of pagan Greece and Rome.

It is only in the East that art still has a philosophy and still remains the great exponent of national faith and race traditions. In Indian idealism we shall find the key to the understanding, not only of all Asiatic art, but to that of the Christian art of the Middle Ages. For the original source of this idealism we must look much further back than the visible beginnings of Indian art, as we now know them from the relics of early Buddhist worship, which date from the first two centuries before Christ. We must fully understand that the motive forces which are behind all art-creation often exist in full strength long before art finds concrete, visible expression in literature and what we call the fine arts.

Archæologists dig in the ground and rummage among the ruined Buddhist *stûpas* of Gandhara, and when they find innumerable statues of the Greek and Roman pantheon, placed between Corinthian pilasters, they believe that here Indian art had its main root, and that Hellenic thought first inspired the ideals of India.

Nothing can be further from the truth. Indian

art reached full expression in the Indian mind many centuries before the Græco-Roman sculptors carved Buddhist images in the temples and monasteries of Gandhara. Indian art was conceived when that wonderful intuition flashed upon the Indian mind that the soul of man is eternal, and one with the Supreme Soul, the Lord and Cause of all things. It took upon itself organic expression in the Vedas and Upanishads, and though in succeeding centuries other thought-centres were formed in Persia, China, and Arabia, the creative force generated from those great philosophical conceptions has not ceased to stimulate the whole art of Asia from that time to the present day.

It is probably an unique phenomenon in the evolution of the world's art that so many centuries elapsed between the complete expression of Indian thought in the Vedas and Upanishads and the full maturity of the technic arts, as revealed in the sculptures of Elephanta, Ellora, and Bôrôbudûr, and in the best Indian Buddhist paintings from the fourth to the eighth centuries A.D., the majority of which have perished.

But when we consider the esoteric and exclusive character of early Aryan culture we shall begin to realise that what seems to be an abnormally slow development in the technic arts in Indian civilisation was deliberately willed as a part of the extraordinary precautions taken by the early Aryan immigrants in India, and their allies, to prevent what they believed to be their divinely inspired

wisdom being perverted by popular superstitions.

Other races, as soon as they have perfected a written language, make haste to enshrine their most intimate thoughts within it; but the wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads and the national religious traditions of the Aryans were always held to be too sacred to be materialised in any form, either in the written word or in the technic arts. If the intellectual aristocracy of the Aryan tribes refrained from committing their thoughts of the Divinity to writing, and strictly observed the Mosaic law, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, or likeness of anything which is in heaven or earth," it was certainly on account of the peculiar conditions in which they found themselves placed, and because they stood on a much higher spiritual plane than the races by which they were surrounded, and not from any lack of artistic genius. The proud Aryan had no missionary zeal: the fear of intellectual and spiritual contamination made him exclusive. His religion was for the chosen people, for his tribe and his family; but, above all, for his own Self, when alone in the forest, on the hill-top, or in the privacy of an inner room in the house, his soul could commune in secret with God.

The poet-priests and chieftains who composed the Vedic hymns and expressed their communings with the Nature-spirits in such beautiful imagery, were great artists who gave to India monuments more durable than bronze; and already in this Vedic

period, centuries before Hellenic culture began to exert its influence upon Asia, India had conceived the whole philosophy of her art. It was the Vedic poets who first proclaimed the identity of the soul of man with the soul of Nature, and laid claim to direct inspiration from God. Vâc, the Divine Word, they said, took possession of the *rishis*, entered into the poet's mind, and made him one with the Universal Self.

This idea of the artist identifying himself with Nature in all her moods is really the keynote of all Asiatic art, poetry, and music. The whole theory of the sacrificial rites expounded in the Brâhmanas is based upon the assumed identity of the elements of the rite with the elements of the universe. The syllables of the Mantras recited by the priests represented the seasons; the details of the sacrificial hearth represented the organs of the human body; the number of the oblations represented the months of the year, and so on. The object of the sacrifices was to bring the sacrificer into direct touch with the Nature-spirits. The *devas* themselves came down from heaven to take part in the sacrificial feast, seating themselves upon the sacred kusha grass. "Formerly men saw them when they came to the feast; to-day they still are present, but invisible." On the other hand, the correct recitation of appropriate hymns transported the soul of the sacrificer to the abode of the gods, just as a boat might carry him over the sea.

From these ideas we can easily understand why

the religious teachers and intellectual aristocracy of the early Aryans needed few concrete images, or symbols, to help them to realise the nature of the Divinity. When they saw the *devas* themselves sitting at the feast, and when men could transport themselves at will to the abode of the Shining Ones, what need had they of gods of wood or stone? The *rishis* declared: "The vulgar look for their gods in water; men of wider knowledge in celestial bodies; the ignorant in wood, bricks, or stones: but the wisest men in the Universal Self."

The Vedic period in India, though it produced no immediate development in what we are accustomed to call the fine arts, must nevertheless be regarded as an age of wonderful artistic richness. The transcendentalism of Vedic thought which could satisfy the intense reverence of the Aryan race for the beauty they felt in nature with vivid mental images of the Nature-spirits is the opposite pole to the barbaric materialism of the present day, which is the negation of all art, and very different from the narrow view of Puritanism, which makes the sense of beauty a snare of the Evil One.

Nor was the Vedic period entirely barren of art in material form. The elaborate rites of the Brâhmanas called forth the highest skill of the decorative craftsman. In the description given in the Râmâyana of the great sacrifice prepared by Vasishtha equal honour was accorded to the skilled craftsmen, "all those who wrought in stone and wood," who made the preparations, and to the priests

who performed the rites; and the priests themselves wrought the gilded posts to which the victims were bound, and which marked out the sacrificial area:

> And now the appointed time came near
> The sacrificial posts to rear.
> They brought them, and prepared to fix
> Of Bel and Khadir six and six;
> Six made of the Palásá-tree,
> Of Fig-tree one, apart to be;
> Of Sheshmát and of Devadár
> One column each, the mightiest far:
> So thick the two that arms of man
> Their ample girth would fail to span
> All these with utmost care were wrought
> By hands of priests in scripture taught,
> And all with gold were gilded bright,
> To add new splendour to the rite:
> Twenty and one those stakes in all,
> Each one-and-twenty cubits tall;
> And one-and-twenty ribbons there
> Hung on the pillars, bright and fair.
> Firm in the earth they stood at last,
> Where cunning craftsmen fixed them fast;
> And then unshaken each remained,
> Octagonal and smoothly planed.
> The ribbons over all were hung,
> The flowers and scent around them flung;
> Thus decked, they cast a glory forth
> Like the great saints who star the north.[1]

The carved posts were the models on which the elaborately ornamented pillars and pilasters of the later Hindu temples were designed. The lamps of the Fire-spirit, Agni, and the libation vessels for the *amrita* of immortality, the soma juice, gave

[1] R. T. H. Griffith's translation.

the types which are used even now in the temple-services of Nepal, Travancore, and other parts of India where Hindu art-traditions are still alive. But the visions of the Vedic seers only materialised to the wonderful sculpture and painting of the great period of Indian art, before the Muhammadan invasion—that is, from the fourth to the tenth centuries A.D.—when Vedic literature was first committed to writing.

Though the Vedic period may seem to Europeans so barren in artistic creation, it is of supreme consequence for the understanding of Indian art. For throughout all the many and varied aspects of Indian art—Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Sikh, and even Saracenic—there runs a golden thread of Vedic thought, binding them together in spite of all their ritualistic and dogmatic differences. Even now, on the ghats of Benares, all Indian men, women, and children, forgetting for once sectarian and racial differences, daily join together in worship of the One God, in similar rites to those which the Aryan people used in the same spot three thousand years ago. There we may see, if we have eyes to see, that all India is one in spirit, however diverse in race and in creed.

It is rather difficult for Europeans, bearing in mind the religious history of Europe, to understand that sectarian differences have never had quite the same significance in India as that which commonly obtains in Europe. It would hardly occur to an Indian who is a devotee of Vishnu to believe that

his neighbour, who worships Siva, is on that account a heretic and doomed to everlasting perdition. Vishnu is to him that aspect of the One Supreme which is most favourable for himself, his family, his caste, or his race: therefore for his worldly and spiritual advantage he will concentrate his thoughts upon that aspect. Vishnu for him becomes also Siva, Brahmâ, and Parameshwar—the Lord of All; but he will not quarrel with his neighbour because he wishes to ascribe all the powers of the Supreme Deity to Siva, on any other aspect of the One.

Sectarian disputes, culminating in bloodshed, rapine and torture, there have been in India times enough; but their origin has been more often connected with rights of property, political jealousies, or racial animosities than with differences of religious dogma. The description given by Chinese travellers of the fifth and seventh centuries A.D., of crowds of Indian devotees of different sects meeting together in the same place, and of Indian universities attended by scores of professors representing as many different schools of philosophy and religion is illustrative of the tolerance of Indian thought in matters of belief. India has always taught that Truth is absolute, but there are many ways of realising it.

CHAPTER II

THE ECLECTIC, OR TRANSITION PERIOD

THE spirituality of the Vedic age was gradually obscured, for a time at least, by the complicated ritualism of the Brahman priesthood, and it was the teaching of Buddha which gave the next great impulse to the development of Indian art, widening the intellectual outlook and correlating the abstract ideas and spiritual vision of the Vedic age with human conduct and the realities of life.

But though Buddhism became the state religion and the dominant creed of the masses at this period, the term "early Buddhist art," which archæologists apply to it, does not convey a complete idea of all the influences which were then moulding Indian art. I would prefer to call it the Eclectic, or Transition period; for it was the time when India was collecting from every quarter of Asia the different materials out of which, in later times, the perfect synthesis of Indian art was formulated, and through which the visions of the Vedic age materialised in the technic arts of the great Buddhist-Hindu epoch.

This Eclectic, or Transition period is the one which has hitherto been treated by archæologists as the starting-point of Indian art: a cardinal error which is due, in the first instance, to the modern scientific method of specialisation, whereby art is treated, not as the full and complete expression of all æsthetic ideas contained in poetry, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and the other technic arts, but as a series of disconnected compartments, each one regulated by different rules and principles. And, secondly, to neglect of the fundamental principle upon which all art-history must be based, that as art is primarily subjective and not objective, we must always seek for the origin of the great art-schools of the world, not in existing monuments and masterpieces or in the fragmentary collections of painting and sculpture in museums, but in the thoughts which created them all. The Vedic period is all-important for the historian, because, except for a very brief period of its history, the Vedic impulse is behind all Indian art.

Except in the case of Saracenic art, it is not often realised what an important influence in the development of art, especially Asiatic, has always been the strong religious prejudice—which was as supreme in the Vedic period as it was in the Reformation in England—against the use of graven images or pictures in sacerdotal ritual. And the art-historian is too apt to assume that, so long as painting and sculpture thus remain under the ban of religion, the fine arts are non-existent and the artistic faculties

are undeveloped. But this is by no means always the case, for thought cannot be suppressed by priestly interdict, and art will find its way notwithstanding. It is a profound mistake to regard the Indian Aryans as an uncreative or inartistic race; for it was Aryan philosophy, which makes all India one to-day, that synthesised all the foreign influences which every invader brought from outside and moulded them to its own ideals.

Throughout all the Vedic period the *devas* came down and sat at the feast, though they were only seen by spiritual vision, and did not reveal themselves to the vulgar. And with art it is always so. We may lavish untold wealth in filling museums and galleries with the masterpieces of the world; but to the gaping crowd the *devas*, though present, always remain unseen.

Though Buddha denied the authority of the Vedas, he was himself a Hindu of the Hindus: and it was the philosophy of the Upanishads, systematised in the philosophical schools, which eventually dominated Buddhist art and made Buddhism a world-religion. But in the first part of the Eclectic period the prevailing influence is not the idealism of Aryan thought, but the naturalism of the non-Aryan races which were converted to Buddhism.

Asoka, the Constantine of India, raised the technic arts employed by Brahmanical ritualism on to a higher intellectual plane, and made the fine arts a potent instrument in national education, and

in his propaganda of the Buddhist faith, which extended to many different parts of Asia. In the Vedic age the practice of the fine arts seems never to have been a priestly vocation, and the non-Aryan tribes probably supplied Asoka with the most skilful sculptors and painters. The members of the Buddhist Sangha were often skilled artists, and wherever the Buddhist missionaries went they took with them pictures and images to assist in expounding the sacred doctrines.

In early Buddhist art, as we know it from the sculptures of Bharhut, Sânchî, and Amarâvatî, we can recognise two distinct groups of racial elements. One represents the vigorous, if somewhat undeveloped indigenous Indian tradition, doubtless belonging to the non-Aryan tribes, which, now released from the domination of the Brahman priesthood, took a prominent part in developing a great national religious art.

But in this group must be included an influence originating in Central and Eastern Asia, doubtless brought by the tribes of the Sakas, Yuëh-chi and others, which were then pouring into India over the north-west frontier. The other element, a less conspicuous one, was an importation from Western Asia of the more polished and refined arts of the Persian school, then under Hellenic influence.

The *stûpa* of Bharhut, Plate I., with its pilgrim's procession-path enclosed by a sculptured rail, belongs to about the third century B.C., and is one of the earliest known existing examples of Indian art.

PLATE I



THE BHARHUT RAIL: EAST GATEWAY

It was one of the numerous monuments erected by the Buddhist Emperor Asoka, either to contain relics of Buddha or to mark the sacred places hallowed by his memory. The symbolism of the earlier sun and nature worship which survived in the Buddhist ritual is conspicuously shown in the plan of the *stûpa*, with its circular rail divided by the four entrances at east, west, north, and south; in the sculptures of the Lokapâlas—the genii defending the approaches to the earth—which flank the gateways, in the lions carved on the columns, and in the great open lotus-flowers which decorate the rail, both of which are emblems of the rising sun. The *stûpa* itself, in its hemispherical dome, simulated the blue overarching vault of the heavens; the tee, or pinnacle of stone umbrellas which crowned the summit, representing the succession of higher spiritual planes leading up to Nirvana.

That Asoka made use of foreign craftsmen to assist in carrying out his colossal architectural enterprises is evident from the purely Persepolitan design of the clustered columns which flank the entrances, and from various details in the carving of the rail. At the same time the sculptures bear witness to the existence, at this early period, of a characteristically Indian artistic tradition, far more virile, robust, and spontaneous than the later eclectic school of Gandhara—a fact which is almost sufficient in itself to prove the fallacy of the archæological theory regarding the predominance of Hellenic inspiration in Indian art. Such a develop-

ment as we find in Asokan art could only have been reached in the course of many centuries, but as nearly all Indian sculpture previous to the Buddhist epoch was in wood, or other impermanent materials, very few traces of its previous history have yet been discovered. Both the forms of construction and the technique of the Bharhut rail are frankly imitations of wooden prototypes.

There can be little doubt that further archæological investigations will, sooner or later, reveal some of the lost vestiges of early Indian art. Hitherto archæological excavations in India have been little more than a scraping of the superficial layers. When the sandy deserts of Rajputana and the lower strata of the alluvial deposits of the Indus and the Ganges, and other sacred rivers, are explored as scientifically and systematically as the sand of Egypt and the soil of Crete we may learn a great deal more of the indigenous Indian art which preceded the Asokan period.

In the treatment of the human form Asokan sculpture exhibits none of the idealistic tendency which is the distinguishing mark of Indian art when it became more thoroughly permeated by the philosophy of the Upanishads. The person of Buddha as a divine being was as yet excluded from plastic or pictorial representation. The Nature-spirits, such as the Lokapâlas, are treated with a naive, anthropomorphic realism, and the circular panels on the upright posts of the rail which alternate with the sun-emblems tell the story of the Buddha's

pre-existences on earth in the same unaffected style of pious narration with which the legends of early Christianity are told in Western art.

The opening chapter of Indian plastic art which begins at Bharhut developed further in the Sânchî sculptures and concluded in the well-known Amarâvatî reliefs of about the third century A.D., now divided between the British, Calcutta, and Madras Museums. The latter, though marked by a higher degree of academic skill, are greatly lacking in the largeness and spontaneity of design which distinguish the sculptures of the earlier school. Much of the present misunderstanding and neglect of Indian art on the part of European critics is due to Fergusson's fatal error of judgment, followed by Sir George Birdwood, Mr. Vincent Smith, and other writers, in regarding the Amarâvatî sculptures as the culminating point of Indian sculpture. How far this is from the truth will, I think, be obvious to any artist who takes the trouble to investigate the subject for himself.

The predominant characteristic in all this early period of Indian art is a naive naturalism of an anecdotic type which runs through all Chinese art when it is not inspired by Indian idealism. Chinese influence reappears in Mogul art, but it was never more strongly felt in Indian art than it was in the time of Asoka. It is in naturalism, not in idealism, that the native, intuitive genius of the Eastern Asiatic races finds its true expression. Not until Indian philosophy and Indian religious

thought penetrated into China did Chinese art take wings and soar into a higher spiritual atmosphere. But, except during those centuries when Mahâyâna Buddhism was supreme, the ideal gods of China, unlike those of India, are always of the earth, earthy. This is probably the reason why this aspect of Chinese art has always been better appreciated by Europeans than the Indian conception of divinity.

In Indian art, even in the Asokan period, a deep undercurrent of Vedic influence can be felt in the entire absence of any attempt to represent what was to a Buddhist the most sacred of all conceptions, the personality of the Blessed One himself. The numerous legends of his previous existences in the form of tree, or bird, or beast, or man; his begging-bowl, and the bodhi-tree under which he gained enlightenment, and even incidents in his earthly life as Prince Siddhartha, all come within the scope of the Asokan artists' descriptive skill; but they never ventured to portray with brush or chisel the person of Buddha, and it must have been a rude shock to pious Buddhists of the old school when, towards the end of the Transition period, the Græco-Bactrian sculptors of Gandhara, employed by the Kushan king, Kanishka, began to represent the Tathâgata as a trim, smug-faced Greek Apollo, posing in the attitude of an Indian yogi.

The importance of the Gandharan school in the evolution of Indian artistic ideals has been

immensely exaggerated by writers obsessed with the idea that everything Greek must be superior to everything Indian. Gandharan art is decadent and lifeless, in so far as it is Greek or Roman; the more it becomes Indian, the more it becomes alive. To regard the Gandharan school of sculpture as furnishing the model on which the Indian divine ideal was founded is to misapprehend entirely the philosophical basis and historical development of Indian art. Gandharan sculpture is not a starting-point, but a late incident in the Eclectic or Transition period, which, excepting a few distinctive technical characteristics, left no permanent impression, and had no influence in shaping Indian ideals.[1]

[1] The position of the Gandharan school is discussed in greater detail in "Indian Sculpture and Painting," by the author. (Murray, 1908.)

CHAPTER III

THE UNIVERSITIES OF NORTHERN INDIA AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ASIATIC ART

It was about the beginning of the Christian era that the great universities of Northern India, in which the many schools of philosophy were combined with schools of painting and sculpture, taking the raw materials provided by the indigenous and foreign non-Aryan technical tradition, the Persepolitan tradition, and the Græco-Roman, or Gandharan tradition, and, moulding them into one, provided Asiatic art once and for ever with a philosophical basis and created the Indian divine ideal in art. This new artistic development was, in fact, the flowering of the ancient Vedic impulse, the teaching of the Upanishads systematised by the philosophical schools and applied to human life and work.

The opposition of Western materialism to the philosophy of the East always makes it difficult for Europeans to approach Indian art with anything like unprejudiced minds. The whole of modern European academic art-teaching has been based upon the unphilosophical theory that beauty is a

quality which is inherent in certain aspects of matter or form, a quality first fully apprehended in the ancient world by the Greeks, and afterwards rediscovered by the artists of the Italian Renaissance.

Just as the Greeks are said to have arrived at their ideal of human and divine beauty by a process of selection between different types of men and women, so we make art a system of discrimination, or differentiation, between what we call beautiful things and ugly things. It is the common complaint of artists that modern dress and modern life are so ugly that they cannot make use of them : so art becomes an archæological cult, having no hold upon popular imagination, for it is cut off from real life and work, and its limits are artificially restricted to a narrow department of ideas into which the world of every-day life does not enter.

Indian thought takes a much wider, a more profound and comprehensive view of art. The Indian artist has the whole creation and every aspect of it for his field; not merely a limited section of it, mapped out by academic professors. Beauty, says the Indian philosopher, is subjective, not objective. It is not inherent in form or matter ; it belongs only to spirit, and can only be apprehended by spiritual vision. There is no beauty in a tree, or flower, or in man or woman, as such. All are perfectly fitted to fulfil their part in the cosmos ; yet the beauty does not lie in the fitness itself, but in the divine idea which is impressed upon those

human minds which are tuned to receive it. The more perfectly our minds are tuned to this divine harmony the more clearly do we perceive the beauty, and the more capable we become, as artists, of revealing it to others. Beauty belongs to the human mind ; there is neither ugliness nor beauty in matter alone, and for an art-student to devote himself wholly to studying form and matter with the idea of extracting beauty therefrom, is as vain as cutting open a drum to see where the sound comes from.

The true aim of the artist is not to extract beauty from nature, but to reveal the Life within life, the Noumenon within phenomenon, the Reality within unreality, and the Soul within matter. When that is revealed, beauty reveals itself. So all nature is beautiful for us, if only we can realise the Divine Idea within it. There is nothing common or unclean in what God has made, but we can only make life beautiful for ourselves by the power of the spirit that is within us. Therefore it is, as the sage Sukracharya says, that, in making images of the gods, the artist should depend upon spiritual vision only, and not upon the appearance of objects perceived by human senses.

To cultivate this faculty of spiritual vision, the powers of intuitive perception, which, until recently, have been regarded in the West as beyond the scope of educational methods, was therefore the main endeavour of the Indian artist in the golden age of Indian art and literature when Buddhism

was transformed by the philosophical schools from a simple code of ethics into a world-religion ; when the immortal Hindu epics, the Râmâyana and the Mahâbhârata, were moulded into their present form ; when the poet Kalidâsa sang at the court of King Vikrama ; and when the sculptors of Elephanta and Ellora hewed out of stupendous masses of living rock their visions of the gods throned in their Himalayan paradise. And if you would inquire what this art means for us I would ask you to consider the whole art of medieval Europe, the great Gothic cathedrals, the sculpture of Chartres and Rheims, and the painting of Italy from Cimabue to Fra Angelico, and see for yourselves an art proceeding from the same inspiration and founded upon the same philosophy.

Throughout Indian art, and throughout the Christian art of the Middle Ages, we find the same central idea—that beauty is inherent in spirit, not in matter. So when, at last, Indian artists of Aryan descent, in the early centuries of the Christian era, reconciled themselves to the idea of representing in material form the actual presence of the gods, they rejected the Hellenic type of gods fashioned entirely after human models, and shaped their ideal of divine form upon the ancient artistic type of an Indian hero, the superman. This was the ideal of physical perfection in human form in early Asiatic art in Egypt and in Crete ; and the symbolism it conveyed had its influence in Greek art also, until the naturalism of Praxiteles and

the later schools of sculptors and painters superseded the idealism on which Hellenic art was originally based.

The Mahâbhârata tells us what this ideal of the superman was. It was the type of a mighty hunter who, in desperate conflicts with the king of beasts, had become invincible and had acquired a lion-like body, with broad chest and shoulders, long, massive arms, a thick neck, and a very slim or wasp-waist.

In the description given in the Mahâbhârata of the grand festival held in honour of Brahmâ at the Court of King Virâta it is said:

"Athletes came to witness it in thousands, like hosts of celestials to the abode of Brahmâ, or of Siva. And they were endowed with huge bodies of great prowess, like the demons called Kâlakhanyas. And, elated by their prowess and proud of their strength, they were highly honoured by the king. And their shoulders and waists and necks were like those of lions, and their bodies were very clean, and their hearts were quite at ease."[1]

Karna, the Kuru hero, is similarly described as "resembling a lion in the formation of his body. He is eight *ratnis* in stature. His arms are large, his chest is broad; he is invincible."

One of the earliest artistic representations of this ideal is seen in the extraordinary paintings and sculptures lately unearthed by Dr. Evans in Crete. The Minoan dandies of about 3000 B.C. are here

[1] P. C. Roy's translation, vol. iv. p. 28.

shown as actually practising tight lacing in the feminine fashion of modern Europe, pinching in their waists to a horrifying degree, apparently with the intention of making their bodies assume this ideal, lion-like form. In Egyptian sculpture and painting the same ideal type of a warrior and hunter constantly appears, though without the unpleasant deformity of Minoan art. The slim waist is also, as I have said, the characteristic of the most virile period of Greek sculpture, and even Aristophanes alludes to a wasp-waisted man as a type of physical fitness.[1]

The Mahâbhârata seems more modern in applying a similar epithet to a woman: "The far-famed daughter of King Matsya, adorned with a golden necklace, ever obedient to her brother, and having a waist slender as that of a wasp."[2] Professor Burrows gives a reference to a Japanese poem of the eighth century A.D., in which an old man is singing of the days of his youth, when his waist was "as slim as any wasp that soareth."[3] He also refers to Professor Petrie's quotations from classical writers which seem to show that the Goths, like the Minoans, practised tight lacing.

These are instances which show how the symbolism of art or religion often takes possession of the popular mind so deeply as to reduce a whole

[1] *Plut.* 558. I am indebted to Professor A. Drachman, of Copenhagen, for this reference.

[2] "Virâta-parva," sect. xxxvii. p. 90. P. C. Roy's translation.

[3] "The Discoveries in Crete," p. 172.

people to a state of intellectual and physical bondage to an abstract idea. When humanity begins to grow weary of this servitude, there is a reaction in art marked by a return to naturalistic ideals, which is not always a true artistic renaissance, though, so far as it is a protest against the undue restraint of human nature by a morbid and unhealthy ritualism, it marks a step forward in the evolution of mankind.

But in this revolt against idealism there always seems to be a tendency to fall into a worse servitude of materialism and sensual depravity. It may be that the science of the future, psychology, will find the way to reconcile this pair of opposites, and through the middle path lead art, both in the East and West, to a grander renaissance than that of Greece or Italy.

While the lion-like body became in Indian art the symbol of physical strength, another essential quality for success in the chase—fleetness of foot—was symbolised by legs like a deer, or gazelle, a characteristic which is very prominent in the figures of the Ajanta cave-paintings and in the Amarâvatî sculptures. Again another attribute, ascribed as a mark of noble birth to the person of Buddha—the long arms—was borrowed from the ideal of a mighty hunter or warrior. I believe that the origin of this idea is to be found in the fact that a great length of arm connotes a long sword-thrust and spear-thrust. In primitive times the long-armed man would have an advantage both in war and in

the chase, so long arms became a symbol of the survival of the fittest, an attribute of nobility.

Now let us see how the sculptors and painters, working in the great philosophical schools of Northern India, about the beginning of the Christian era, employed this very ancient ideal form to express the quality of the divine nature and the power of the spirit, instead of physical strength. At that time the original Buddhist creed had been profoundly affected by the Yoga philosophy of Patañjali, and the teaching of Nâgârjuna had created the division between the Mahâyâna and Hînayâna doctrines ; but by both schools the Buddha was no longer regarded as a human personality, or superman, but as a divine being who, through a long cycle of many previous existences on earth, and by the power of Yoga, had not only attained to perfect wisdom and thrown off the bondage of the flesh, but had won dominion over the whole universe.

Yet as this Yoga was not the terrible self-torture of the Hindu ascetic, but the Yoga of a pure and holy life, the Master could never appear to pious Buddhist eyes with shrunken flesh, swollen veins, and protruding bones—a hideous living skeleton, as sometimes portrayed in Gandharan sculpture. Even when, in his earlier efforts to obtain enlightenment, he had practised self-mortification for six long years—"vainly trying to attain merit, performing many rules of abstinence, hard for a man to carry out."—still, the Buddhist poet declares, "the emaciation which was produced in his body

by that asceticism became positive fatness through the splendour which invested him. Though thin, yet with his glory unimpaired, he caused gladness to other eyes, as the autumnal moon in the beginning of her bright fortnight gladdens the lotuses. Having only skin and bone remaining, with his fat, flesh, and blood entirely wasted, yet, though diminished [in body] he still shone with undiminished grandeur like the ocean."[1]

And in that supreme hour, under the bodhi-tree at Gaya, when, as his full enlightenment was accomplished, Mâra, the wicked one, fled vanquished; "the different regions of the sky grew clear, the moon shone forth, showers of flowers fell down from the sky upon the earth, and the night gleamed like a spotless maiden"—and at last the dawn flushed in the east, and all the *devas* thronged together, and the Buddhas from worlds innumerable:

> Kings at fierce war called truce; the sick men leaped,
> Laughing, from beds of pain; the dying smiled,
> As though they knew that happy morn was sprung
> From fountains farther than the utmost East.[2]

Then the great Yogi was reborn, and he appeared to mortal eyes as the Victor, the Hero, the Shining One, endowed with eternal youth and strength, filling the whole world with light.

[1] "Buddha-karita of Ashvagosha," book xii. pp. 94–6. Translated by E. B. Cowell,

[2] "The Light of Asia," by Sir E. Arnold, p. 178, Thirty-second Edition.

To symbolise this spiritual rebirth, Indian artists moulded their divine ideal upon the race-tradition of a mighty warrior, with supple, rounded limbs, smooth, golden-coloured skin and a lion-like body, expressing the beauty of bodily purification, when the soul is freed from the grosser attachments of earth, and the spiritual strength which every human soul might gain by the Yoga of Service, by the Yoga of Knowledge, or by the Yoga of Faith.

The Mahâbhârata, in referring to the spiritual power to be acquired by Yoga, says: "He, O King, who, devoted to the practice of austerities, betaketh himself to Brahmacharya in its entirety, and thereby purifieth his body, is truly wise; for by this he becometh as a child, free from all evil passions, and triumpheth over death at last." But it adds also that it was through the practice of Yoga that the heavenly musicians and dancers, the Gandharvas and Apsaras, acquired the marvellous physical beauty they possessed. And so in both Hindu and Buddhist artistic canons it is laid down that the forms of gods, who also, like human beings, acquired divine powers by ascetic practices, were nevertheless not to be represented like the human ascetic with bodies emaciated by hunger and thirst, bones protruding, and swollen veins, but with smooth skin, rounded limbs, the veins and bones always concealed, the neck and shoulders massive and strong, and the waist narrow, like the body of a lion.

It was by Yoga also—by spiritual insight or intuition—rather than by observation and analysis of physical form and facts, that the sculptor or painter must attain to the highest power of artistic expression. Indian art is not concerned with the conscious striving after beauty as a thing worthy to be sought after for its own sake: its main endeavour is always directed towards the realisation of an idea, reaching through the finite to the infinite, convinced always that, through the constant effort to express the spiritual origin of all earthly beauty, the human mind will take in more and more of the perfect beauty of divinity.

The whole spirit of Indian thought is symbolised in the conception of the Buddha sitting on his lotus-throne, calm, impassive, his thoughts freed from all worldly passions and desires, and with both mind and body raised above all intellectual and physical strife; yet filled with more than human power, derived from perfect communion with the source of all truth, all knowledge, and all strength. It is the antithesis of the Western ideal of physical energy: it is the symbol of the power of the spirit, which comes not by wrestling, nor by intellectual striving, but by the gift of God, by prayer and meditation, by Yoga, union with the Universal Soul.

The Buddhist writings are always insisting upon the power of this supreme intelligence which sees "without obscurity and without passion"; and, to to quote one of the most able exponents of Indian

art in modern times, Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy: "What, after all, is the secret of Indian greatness? Not a dogma or a book, but the great open secret that all knowledge and all truth are absolute and infinite, waiting, not to be created, but to be found; the secret of the infinite superiority of intuition, the method of direct perception over intellect, regarded as a mere organ of discrimination."

"There is about us a storehouse of the as-yet-unknown infinite and inexhaustible; but to this wisdom the way of access is not through intellectual activity. The intuition that reaches it we call imagination, or genius. It came to Sir Isaac Newton when he saw the apple fall, and there flashed across his brain the law of gravity. It came to the Buddha as he sat through the silent nights in meditation, and hour by hour all things became apparent to him: he knew the exact circumstances of all being that had ever been in the endless and infinite worlds; at the twentieth hour he received the divine insight by which he saw all things within the space of the infinite *sakvalas* as clearly as if they were close at hand; then came still deeper insight, and he perceived the cause of sorrow and the path of knowledge. "He reaches at last the exhaustless source of truth." The same is true of all "revelation"; the Veda (*S'ruti*); the eternal *Logos*, "breathed forth by Brahman," in whom it survives the destruction and creation of the universe, is "seen," or "heard," not made, by its human authors . . . 'The reality of such per-

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ception is witnessed by every man within himself upon rare occasions and on an infinitely smaller scale. It is at once the vision of the artist and the imagination of the natural philosopher."[1]

This conception of the Buddha reached its highest expression, in sculpture, in the magnificent statue at Anuradhapura,[2] which represents the Indian prototype of the Buddhist statues of China and Japan, as well as those of Java, though very few rise to quite the same height of spirituality. One of the exceptions is the beautiful statue of Avalokitêshvara (Plate II.), "the Lord who looks down with pity on all men," from Bôrôbudûr, in Java, the great Buddhist temple the building of which began about the eighth century A.D. This sculpture, however, must be attributed to a later period, perhaps the tenth century. It may be compared with the equally fine Dhyâni-Buddha from the same place, illustrated in "Indian Sculpture and Painting."

According to the theogony of Mahâyâna Buddhism, the Supreme or Âdi-Buddha, who corresponds to the Hindu conception of Ishvara, wished from the One to become Many, which desire is denominated Prajña, Divine Wisdom. Buddha and Prajña united were the Father and Mother of the universe. In the instant of conceiving this desire five divine beings, called the five Dhyâni-Buddhas —Vairochana, Akshobya, Ratna-sambava, Ami-

[1] "Aims of Indian Art," pp. 1 and 2.

[2] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate III.

PLATE II

AVALOKITÊSHVARA

tâbha, and Amogha-siddha—were produced. Each of these Dhyâni-Buddhas produced from himself another being, called a Dhyâni-Bodhisattva, who had each a practical part in the evolution and guardianship of the universe. The five Dhyâni-Bodhisattvas are Samanta-Bhadra; Vajrapâni, the Buddhist Indra, distinguished by his thunderbolt, or *vajra*; Ratnapâni; Padmapâni, or Avalokitêshvara; and Visvapâni.[1]

Avalokitêshvara corresponds to the Vaishnavaite conception of Vishnu as both Creator and Preserver (Plates III. and XX.). He is adorned with similar symbolic ornaments, and on his tiara is a small figure of the Dhyâni-Buddha, Amitâbha, the Lord of Infinite Light, who, like Vishnu, is symbolised in the midday sun.

He is seated on his lotus-throne; behind his head is an aureole shaped like the leaf of the sacred pipal-tree. The left hand assumes the symbolic gesture of *dharma-chakra-mudrâ* as he expounds one of the points of the divine law. The open right hand signifies the bestowal of a gift (*varamudrâ*). The lower limbs are released from the rigid "adamantine" pose of profound meditation assumed by Amitâbha, and the right leg, stretched out, rests in front of the throne on another lotus-flower which symbolises the universe created by the Divine Magician for his footstool.

[1] Brian Hodgson, "Essays on the Languages, etc., of Nepal and Tibet," p. 42.

This sculpture is distinguished by an exquisite purity of sentiment and a perfection of technique which is not excelled by any of the great works of Buddhist art in China and Japan ; but, above all, by that inspired feeling of divine grandeur and sense of high spiritual exaltation, beyond the range of human intellectuality, which animate all the best religious art of India.

It is precisely in that austere Himâlayan grandeur, in an almost indefinable sense of the sublime, where the more feminine and more realistic conceptions of China and Japan seem to belong to a lower spiritual plane than their Indian prototypes. The divinities of the Farther East appear to dwell in an earthly paradise, a fair garden of peace planted in some quiet, sequestered valley, filled with delicately perfumed flowers, where it is always springtime. The Indian Olympus affords no such sensuous delights : it is pinnacled among the highest Himâlayan solitudes, never trodden by human foot, often shrouded in mist and cloud, only seen sometimes from afar—as in a vision—in the rosy light of dawn, or when the last rays of the setting sun light up its furthest depths with burnished gold and show to our wondering gaze the gates of heaven.

The ritual of Mahâyâna Buddhism in Northern India, used to create in the mind of the devotee vivid mental images of the divinity invoked, throws much light on Indian religious art and

the methods of the artist. M. Foucher, in his valuable "Étude sur l'Iconographie Bouddhique de l'Inde," gives extracts from various Tantric manuscripts of the twelfth century relating to this subject. Though, as in other religions, such formularies may become a means of self-deception and be used as a cloak for superstition and sacerdotal charlatanism, they nevertheless reflect the devotional spirit of true religious art; they embody principles common to the whole art of Asia even in the present day, and explain the practice of Indian Yoga, as applied to æsthetics, from the earliest times.

The yogin, devotee, artist, or "magician" (in Indian thought the Creator is the Mahâ-yogi and all creative art is "magic") having purified his physical body by ablutions, and put on clean garments, repaired to a solitary place appropriate for the motive he had in his mind. If the benign powers of nature were to be invoked, he would choose the forest shade, or the bank of a holy river; but if the *tamasik*, or destructive powers, then he must seek a place of gloom and dread, such as a cremation ground, or cemetery. There, seating himself on a purified spot, he invokes the hosts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into the space in front of him and offers them flowers and perfumes, real or imaginary.

Then he commences to recite the "Sevenfold Office"—the confession of his sins; an expression of joyous sympathy for the merit of others; belief

in the Three Jewels of the Buddhist faith, Buddha, the Doctrine, and the Community ; a resolution to persevere in the good way ; a prayer to all the Blessed Ones that they will continue to preach the doctrine, and further consent, for the world's good, to forego for a time the right they have earned to enter into Nirvana ; and, finally, the dedication of all the merit he himself acquires to the universal welfare of humanity.

This preliminary ritual, like that which now precedes the Brahmin's daily *sandhya*, is by way of spiritual purification, to prepare the mind for the meditative exercises which follow. He must now realise by thought the four infinite qualities, or perfect states, which are love for all, compassion for the miserable, joy in the happiness of others, and even-mindedness. The next two meditations, leading up to the final ecstasy, are on the original purity of the first principles of all things, and, as a corollary, on their emptiness or absolute non-existence. "By the fire of the idea of emptiness," says the text, "the five elements of individual consciousness are destroyed beyond recovery." The identity of the yogin being thus completely merged with that of the divinity invoked, he has but to utter the appropriate mystic syllable which contains the "germ" of the divinity, to make the proper gesture, or *mudrâ*, and to recite the correct *mantra*, to realise his desire. The apparition of the god or goddess presents itself to his mental

vision, "like a reflection in a mirror," or "as in a dream."[1]

Mutatis mutandis, this might be a description of the ecstasy of an artist monk in medieval Europe. But whereas the Western mystic seems to have allowed himself to be carried away, more or less unconsciously, by an unbalanced and uncontrolled access of emotionalism, the practice of Yoga in India, recognised as a branch of philosophy, was from the earliest times reduced to a scientific system.

Underneath the mysticism of the Indian yogin's ritual there are scientific psychological principles, fundamental to oriental idealism, the due recognition of which might greatly benefit art-education in the West. The first principle insisted upon is the influence of environment upon the temperament or mood of the artist. Next, that the faculty of artistic imagination, by which thought-forms are created, is as much susceptible to development by methodic mental practice and training as are the executive technical powers by which they become materialised in forms of art. Thirdly, the necessity for the artist to identify himself absolutely with his subject, or to merge his own consciousness in that aspect of nature which he wishes to interpret.

Shelley, in his "Ode to the West Wind," expresses perfectly the whole idea of Yoga in art:

[1] See "Étude sur l'Iconographie Bouddhique de l'Inde," par A. Foucher, Part II., Introduction, pp. 8-11.

Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is.
What if my leaves are falling as its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! be thou me, impetuous One!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth;
And by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth,
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Art thus becomes less the pursuit of beauty than an attempt to realise the life which is without and beyond by the life which is within us—life in all its fulness and mystery, which is, and was, and is to come.

It is hardly possible for a Western artist to appreciate the psychology and practice of oriental art without knowing that the practice of Yoga was combined with a most elaborate and scientific mnemonic system, by means of which the whole of Sanskrit literature was handed down from one generation to another, from the Vedic period until medieval times, without being committed to writing in any form. Probably the severely mechanical kind of mental exercise which this entailed was considered a necessary intellectual complement to the psychic training of Yoga. However this may be, the whole practice of the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese schools of painting and sculpture was based upon methods derived from this mnemonic and psychic training, as given in

the Universities of Northern India; and here the West has much to learn from the East, for the essential faculties of the artist, imagination and memory, are those which are least considered in the curriculum of modern European academies, where the paraphernalia of the studio are used to make up for the deficiencies in the mental equipment of the student.

The West, surfeited with the materialism of the Renaissance, is already slowly turning again to the East for spiritual instruction. The East, reawakening, is becoming conscious of the truth of her inspiration, and at the same time is learning, from contact with Western civilisation, the causes of her own decadence.

The supreme importance of the great Universities of Northern India in their influence upon the development of the whole art of Asia is not yet understood by the few English writers who have studied Chinese and Japanese art, especially by those who have never visited the East. Mr. Laurence Binyon, in his admirable and otherwise well-informed book, "Painting in the Far East," commits himself to the following statement, which is also very typical of Anglo-Indian opinion:

"It would be natural, in lack of evidence, to suppose that India, which gave to Asia the kindling ideals and imagery of Buddhism, was the land to which we should turn for the noblest creations of art. Yet we are confronted at once by the fact that, in creative art, India is comparatively poor."

That this should represent enlightened critical opinion in the metropolis of the Empire in the year of grace 1909 will give future historians of British India much to reflect upon. Artistic Europe has been prevented from recognising the fulness of Indian creative genius by the peculiar attitude towards Indian art taken up by the administration of the principal European Museums. This attitude is no longer maintained on the continent of Europe; and in Paris, Berlin, and in the Dutch Museums the student can now realise to some extent the commanding influence of Indian thought in the evolution of all the great art of Asia, an influence which has been long recognised by the best Chinese and Japanese critics.

It is not only as centres for the propaganda of the Buddhist faith, but much more as schools of Hindu philosophy, that the influence of the Indian Universities was felt in China and Japan. Mr. Binyon refers to a Chinese artist and writer of the sixth century A.D., who published a theory of æsthetic principles "which became a classic and received universal acceptance, expressing as it did the deeply rooted instincts of the race. In this theory it is rhythm which holds a paramount place; not, be it observed, imitation of nature, or fidelity to nature which the general instinct of Western races make the root concern of art. In this theory every work of art is thought of as an incarnation of the genius of rhythm, manifesting the living spirit of things with a clearer beauty and intenser

power than the gross impediments of complex matter allow to be transmitted to our senses in the visible world around us. A picture is conceived as a sort of apparition from a more real world of essential life. . . . The inner and informing spirit, not the outward semblance, is for all painters of the Asian tradition the object of art, the aim with which they wrestle."

What is this theory of æsthetic principles, with its psychic vision, or "apparition from a more real world of essential life," but the Chinese paraphrase, or adaptation to a secular *milieu*, of the Indian Buddhist religious ritual, which I have described above?

Mr. Binyon is evidently unaware that in this treatise the Chinese writer, whose thoughts were saturated with the mysticism of Mahâyâna Buddhism, is simply stating the basic principle of Indian art, a theory derived by Chinese artists from the Indian philosophical schools. In the fifth century A.D., as Professor Hackmann remarks, commenced the great revival of Buddhism in China, and crowds of Chinese pilgrims and scholars began to flock to India, studying in the philosophical schools, where painting and sculpture were taught as a part of the Buddhist religion, and bringing back with them into China Buddhist pictures and images. In the sixth century, when the treatise above quoted was penned, "the Patriarch of Indian Buddhism, Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth in the list of Buddha's successors, left his

native land and imigrated to China, which thenceforward became the seat of the patriarchate."[1] This fact alone is sufficient to show how predominant must have been the influence of Indian thought in Chinese art and literature at that time, even though it may not be easily traced in the collections at present existing in Europe.

Europeans can better understand what that influence was if they try to realise what would have been the effect upon Italian art, supposing that in the days of the early Renaissance Rome had been converted to Buddhism by Chinese or Japanese missionaries; or, *vice-versâ*, the effect upon Chinese art if the Emperor had become Christian and the Pope and College of Cardinals had established themselves at Pekin.

It is curious that Mr. Binyon, with his rare gift of artistic insight, does not seem to perceive that, to the oriental artist, his clear recognition of the fact that India "gave to Asia the kindling ideals and imagery of Buddhism" and his denial of India's creative genius in art must seem strangely inconsistent. For, just as the whole essence of Asiatic art-creation lies in "the inner informing spirit," not in the imitation of outward semblances, so we must estimate the comparative influence of one school of Asiatic art upon another, not by mere affinities in forms of expression, or in technique, but by the extent to which the original creative thought-power in the one acted upon that of the other.

[1] "Buddhism as a Religion," p. 80. Probsthain's Oriental Series.

In one eloquent passage Mr. Binyon admits the influence of Indian thought in shaping the artistic ideals of China and Japan:

"The ideas of Buddhism saturate the art of China and Japan. To the Buddhist this world is transitory, vile, and miserable; the flesh is a burden, desire an evil, personality a prison. And all through the classic art of those countries, though these conceptions have been turned to gracious and sweet uses in the life of human intercourse, and though the old Adam of humanity breaks forth from time to time in celebration of war, adventure, and the deeds of heroes, yet the Indian ideal claims everywhere its votaries, and the chosen and recurrent theme is the beauty of contemplation, not of action. Not the glory of the naked human form, to Western art the noblest and most expressive of symbols; not the proud and conscious assertion of human personality; but, instead of these, all thoughts that lead us out from ourselves into the universal life, hints of the infinite, whispers from secret sources—mountains, waters, mists, flowering trees, whatever tells of powers and presences mightier than ourselves: these are the themes dwelt upon, cherished, and preferred."[1]

It is just such thoughts as these which inspired the Indian sculptor and the Indian master-builder in the great epoch of Buddhist-Hindu art which was contemporary with the early schools of ideal painting in China and Japan. And though usually more austere and more severely restrained in the

[1] "Painting in the Far East," p. 22.

form of expression, the creative genius of India in sculpture and in architecture was not less great than that shown by China and Japan in the sister art. There is a reason, quite apart from æsthetics, why India has so little to show in painting compared with China and Japan. When the idea of salvation by works[1] took firm hold of the Indian mind, it became a religious duty on the part of the Indian artist and his patron to adopt the most strenuous, the most laborious, and at the same time the most enduring methods of artistic expression—for the greater the toil involved in the work the greater would be the merit won. To decorate a relic-shrine, temple, or monastery with high reliefs in stone would bring more reward in a future existence, both to the artists and craftsmen and to those who provided them with the necessities of life, than the simpler and less costly method of painting in fresco.

Thus the early wooden architecture of Buddhist India gradually gave place to lithic forms of construction, and religious fervour developed a great school of architectural sculpture by which Indian art in later times was better protected from the savagery of Mogul and other iconoclasts who have destroyed all but the last vestiges of Buddhist religious paintings.

[1] See Chapter VII.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIVINE IDEAL

In the previous chapter I have explained the artistic ideal of the human or divine figure, expressing spiritual instead of physical strength, which Indian sculptors and painters inspired by Aryan philosophy gradually evolved out of the eclectic elements of the Transition period. It was an ideal common to all schools of religious thought—Jain, Buddhist, or Brahmanical. The Jains adapted it to their Tirthankaras, the Buddhists to their Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the orthodox Brahmanical sects to the divinities of their own pantheon: for, in spite of the diversity of sects, there is a common spiritual basis to all Indian art and religion. Philosophers differed as to the precise relation between Purusha and Prakriti, Soul and Matter, and religious teachers disputed over the different ways by which the soul might gain salvation; but there were fundamentals upon which all philosophers agreed, and the end to be attained was the same to all sectarians.

Just as the great Hindu hero, Krishna, has in

the Mahâbhârata a dual personality, one human and one divine, so this transcendental, lion-like ideal always retained in Indian art a symbolism of a dual character, according as it was applied to a human being or to a *deva*, a spiritual being, or Mahadeva—God. When a human being is represented, the slim-waisted, lion-like figure is the type of aristocratic birth, the mark of the Kshatriya, or warrior. In the Amarâvatî sculptures, where the transition from the Sânchî and Gandharan types to the ideal Hindu-Buddhist types is very evident, the Sâkya lords, the cousins of Prince Siddhârtha, all have this type of figure. The squat, full-bellied figures generally indicate menials and inferior races; though, in the same artistic category, the well-fed Brahmin guru and a number of fanciful dwarfish demons were included.

When the divine being is intended a distinction is made by the nimbus round the head, the aura surrounding the body, and sometimes the *ûrnâ*, the mark in the centre of the forehead, signifying spiritual insight. Kings and princes were also honoured by the nimbus as a symbol of their divine descent.

The aura represents the subtile, luminous envelope, by which, according to psychists, the bodies of all human beings, animals, and even trees, plants, and stones are surrounded, though to those without a developed psychic sense it is invisible. The Lalita Vistara describes how, soon as Gautama had seated himself under the

bodhi-tree, a brilliant light shone from his body which illuminated, in the ten points of space, the innumerable spheres of Buddha. Aroused from their meditations by this wonderful light, the Buddhas came from every side and caused to appear all sorts of precious things, which they offered to the Bodhisattva. The gods thronged together also, and made a great rain to fall from heaven, bringing with it joy and well-being. In Buddhist pictures the aura is represented by thin, wavy lines of gold, which in Chinese are called *kao huang*—"hair-rays."

Mr. E. R. Innes, in a recent number of *The Quest*,[2] has an interesting article on the aura, as it appears to the psychic, in human beings, animals, and in what are usually called "inanimate" objects. He says: "The aura of nearly all plants and wild animals is pleasant and health-giving to man. When man meets another man there is always the question of harmonising his aura to that of his companion; for human auras are specialised." But the sensitive, "in contacting these nature-auras, experiences great refreshment. They are life-giving and soul-inspiring to his own aura; they have the effect of sweeping it clean, or purifying it; they tend to despecialise it, or urge it to return to a more simple or primitive mode of motion; and this, for most men, is exceedingly beneficial, restful, and vitalising; for civilised man is

[1] Hackmann, "Buddhism as a Religion," p. 208.

[2] January 1910.

very liable to become too specialised . . . in the country, where man is freer and less likely to jostle up against other [human] auras, the human aura tends to expand and to reach its utmost limit." Mr. Innes adds that perhaps this is the reason why, in all ages, those who desired to train and develop psychic capacity have been recommended to spend much time in solitude, or in quiet retreats, for here the aura expands and grows and becomes active far more easily.

The *ûrnâ*, which in Buddhist images of metal, stone, or wood was often indicated by a pearl or jewel, is the symbol of the "eye divine," and afterwards developed into the third eye of Siva. In this form it appears also in later Buddhist images. It is the sign of spiritual consciousness, of soul-sight as distinguished from eye-sight and intellectual perception. It was by way of the *ûrnâ* that the divine inspiration reached the *ushnisha*, the prominence on the Buddha's skull, regarded as the seat of the intellectual faculties. The word *ûrnâ* itself, literally meaning "wool," has been a constant puzzle to Sanskrit and Pali scholars. The explanation of it is, I believe, that the Divine Light, by means of which Gautama gained his Buddhahood, was conceived as converging towards the centre of his forehead from "the innumerable worlds" and entering his brain in flashes, like the lightning in an Indian sky, which is always drawn in Indian pictures in thin, wavy lines, never in the zigzag fashion of the "forked lightning" usually

represented in European art. This practice is based on accurate observation of the lightning usually seen in Indian skies, as instantaneous photography proves.

Now a number of such wavy lines, light-flashes, or "hair-rays" converging to a single point would strikingly suggest a tuft of wool, each hair of which would symbolise a ray of cosmic light. When Gautama at last attained to perfect enlightenment, or perfect communion with the Divine Consciousness, the cosmic light he had absorbed was conceived as issuing from his brain for the enlightenment of his followers. This mode of suggesting a mystic idea by concrete symbolism is characteristically Eastern.[1]

The tremendous power attributed to this cosmic spiritual light is illustrated in the well-known story of Kâma, the god of love, being burnt to ashes by the fire which flashed from the third eye of Siva, when, at Indra's instigation, he had dared to disturb the great god's meditation. The comparative helplessness of intellectuality without the divine inspiration is delightfully symbolised in Hindu art by the quaint figure of Ganesha, the god of worldly wisdom, Siva's son, who is represented with an elephant's head placed on an infant's body.

The only physical action permitted in this symbolism of spiritual force is some slight move-

[1] Mr. G. R. S. Mead suggests to me that the same symbolism may underlie the sufiism of Persia—*sûf* meaning wool.

ment of the hands and lower limbs, when the Buddha, or Bodhisattva, emerged from the state of profound meditation to instruct or bless his worshippers: these are the *âsanas*, the symbolic attitudes of the body, and the *mudrâs*, the gestures of the hands. In the state of profound meditation (*vajrâsana*) the legs are firmly locked together with the soles of the feet turned upwards, the hands lying in the lap, supinated one above the other, sometimes holding a vessel containing *amrita*, the nectar of immortality. This is the pose of absolute immobility. The first movement is one which the Buddha made at the crisis of his temptation by Mâra, when, in reply to the taunts of the Spirit of Evil, he pointed with his right hand to the earth, citing it as a witness to his attainment of Buddhahood. This is the *bhûmi-parsâ-mudrâ*, or the earth-witness gesture. There are various gestures having the significance of teaching, or argument, when a Buddha or Bodhisattva is enforcing points of doctrine, or "turning the wheel of the law," emphasising them by touching or holding the fingers of the left hand with the thumb and fingers of the right. The bestowal of a blessing is indicated by the right hand being raised, with the palm turned outwards, the forearm sometimes resting on the right knee, sometimes lifted up.

The movements of the legs indicate various degrees of removal from the state of profound meditation, beginning with a slight relaxation of

the rigid pose of the yogin, and ending with standing erect, a common attitude of Maitreya, the Buddhist Messiah. The symbolism of pose and gesture is brought to a fine art in the movements of Indian dancers, and this part of the subject would make an interesting study by itself; but I am not able to pursue it further at present.

In the philosophical schools the original simple conception of the Buddha's glorified personality gradually developed into that of the Dhyâni-Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The former represent the spiritual essence, or ideal form, belonging to the Buddhas who are conceived as existing in a higher plane of abstract thought, known as *rupaloka*. Every Buddha who appears temporarily on earth to instruct humanity is a counterpart of one of these higher spiritual entities, embodied in human form. In order to provide for a head and protector of the Buddhist faith during the interval between the disappearance of one earthly Buddha and the coming of the next, the Dhyâni-Buddhas produce from themselves spiritual emanations of less potency known as Bodhisattvas, which are sometimes incarnated in human beings, *e.g.* the Dalai Lama of Tibet is said to be an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Padmapâni, or Avalokiteshvara.

When, finally, these metaphysical speculations extended to the idea of an Âdi-Buddha as the Supreme Lord and Creator of the universe, there was no essential difference except in terminology

between Mahâyâna Buddhism and the orthodox Hindu pantheon.

Buddhism, as a distinct sect, disappeared from the land of its birth only because, in the general evolution of Hindu philosophy, its doctrines merged into the main current of Aryan thought, as the river Jumna is lost when it unites with the waters of the Ganges. The ethics of Buddhism became an essential part of Hindu religious teaching, and in this sense the religion of Buddha remains as potent a force in the India of to-day as it is in any other part of Asia.

We will pass on to see how this divine ideal, under the continued influence of the philosophical schools, became further modified and assumed other symbolical or allegorical forms which to academic Europe generally seem extravagant and even offensive; though in their Indian environment, even when their meaning is not fully understood, they are often profoundly impressive. The philosophic mind of India, observing the rapid working of the great forces of nature in a tropical climate, could not fail to be impressed by one fact, which is less patent to inhabitants of temperate climates. The ravages caused by frequent shock of earthquake or rush of mighty floods in the Himâlayan regions, leaving scars upon the surface of Mother Earth which in temperate latitudes would not disappear for several generations of men, under the stimulating heat of the tropical sun are healed in a few short years. Every hot

season in the plains of India the scorching sun burns up the vegetation, silences the voices of nature, and makes all the land seem a dreary desert. Yet the Indian peasant knows full well that the cracking of the sun-baked soil is but one of the fertilising processes of nature, and that with the first downpour of the monsoon rains his fields will be bursting with exuberant, joyful life.

So the destructive powers which to us seem to be only malignant and ugly, fraught with evil to mankind, appear to the Indian mind as an essential part of the Divine Order, and belonging to the great Rhythm of things. Siva, the Destroyer, is also the Regenerator and the Lord of Bliss. Kâlî, the ruthless Ender of Time, who demands human victims at her sacrifices, is at the same time the kindly Mother of the Universe. The good and evil in nature both belong to God: human sickness and suffering are not, as the Greeks believed, due to the envy of the gods, but come from *avidhyâ*, an imperfect comprehension of the Divine Law. So, whereas the Greek conception of the Divine Form confined beauty to an order of things which seemed pleasant and normal in ordinary human existence, the Indian artist makes no distinction between good and evil, as popularly understood, and, striving to show the Divine Idea in both, tells us that God's ways are not as man's ways and that the Divine Form embraces all forms. The Divine Idea embraces both beauty

and ugliness, as commonly understood, but transcends them both.

As soon as the agnosticism of Buddha's original teaching gave place to definite conceptions of the Fatherhood of God, as expounded in the "Bhagavad Gitâ," it appeared to Hindu philosophers that neither the anthropomorphic ideal of the Greeks nor the ideal of the Indian hero which the Buddhist and Jain artists had adopted was adequate to symbolise the universal attributes of the Lord and Cause of all things. When Krishna, having bestowed upon Arjuna the gift of the "eye divine," conceded his prayer to reveal to him his Universal Form, this is how the resplendent, awful vision, never before seen by mortal man, is described by the Hindu poet:

> God! In Thy body I see all the gods,
> And all the varied hosts of living things,
> And sovereign Brahmâ on His lotus-throne,
> And all the *rishis* and the snakes divine.
> I see Thee with unnumbered arms and breasts,
> And eyes and faces infinite in form.
> I see not either source or mean or end
> Of Thee, the Universal Form and Lord,
> Bearing Thy diadem, Thy club, and disc.
> I see Thee glowing as a mass of light
> In every region, hard to look upon,
> Bright as the blaze of burning fire and sun,
> On every side, and vast beyond all bound.
> The Undivided Thou, the highest point
> Of human thought, and seat supreme of all;
> Eternal law's undying guardian Thou;
> The everlasting Cause Thou seem'st to me.
> I see not Thy beginning, mean, or end;

Thy strength, Thy arms, are infinite alike,
And unto Thee the sun and moon are eyes;
I see Thy face, that glows as sacred fire,
And with its radiance heats the universe;
For all the heavenly regions and the space
'Twixt earth and heaven are filled by Thee alone.[1]

Even to Arjuna, though fortified with supernatural strength, this tremendous apparition seemed insupportable, and he begged of Krishna to resume his "milder, four-armed form," that which, though revealing his universal attributes, was not too awful for man to look upon.

Compared with such a conception of the universal Divine Form, the anthropomorphic gods of Greece and Rome seem puny and devoid of imagination, and I cannot help thinking that those European critics are altogether unjust and lacking in artistic insight who would judge by the ordinary conventions and canons of European art the efforts of Indian artists to express the supernatural and superhuman by forms not strictly in accordance with known physiological laws. Art does not need to be justified by the anatomist, or the chemist, or by any other scientific specialist. Every artistic convention is justified if it is used artistically and expresses the idea which the artist wishes to convey. Indian art is easily intelligible to those who will read it in the light of Indian religion and philosophy, which inspired both the artists and the people to whom the art was addressed.

[1] The "Bhagavad-Gitâ," pp. 121–2, translated by John Davies. Trübner's Oriental Series.

But, like all other art, it must be seen in its local environment, and in the atmosphere of the thought which created it. Nothing can be more misleading than to judge it by the isolated and generally inferior specimens which are seen in European museums, very few of which have, until recently, considered Indian sculpture and painting as worthy of serious study by Western artists.

India has always clearly recognised the limitations of artistic expression. Art is knowledge; art is expression. Therefore art cannot supply a symbol for the Inexpressible, the Unknowable, and the Unconditioned. Though only the Qurân definitely placed a ban upon using any animate forms in art, the objection which underlies the prohibition did not originate with Islam. It is as old as the Vedas. The very word with which the Universal Self was expressed in Hindu philosophy was so holy that it was profanation for common lips to utter it. In a great Hindu temple in Southern India it is represented by Space—an empty cell. In Indian colour-symbolism it is expressed by black, the absence of colour.

The first comprehensible and expressible manifestation of the Unknowable, before creation itself, was conceived by ancient philosophers as the Egg, or Womb of the Universe, and was afterwards symbolised in India by a female form, Kâlî, as the Mother of all the Gods. I believe that the first symbols in art ever used by the teachers of Vedic philosophy were those smooth, egg-shaped

stones, untouched by human craftsmen, which are placed beneath sacred trees and still worshipped throughout the length and breadth of India, though the meaning of the symbolism seems to be forgotten, except perhaps by a few intellectual Brahmins.

The stones symbolise the First Germ, the Egg of the Universe. The tree, with its spreading branches and leaves, is the Universe itself: a well-known symbol of the One in many used by worshippers of Vishnu, the Preserver, in the present day. The snake which, carved in stone, is often worshipped at the same place, is a recognised symbol of reincarnation, the process by which the evolution of the soul is gained—a universal belief in India. Thus the stone, the tree, and the serpent represent the birth and evolution of the cosmos, and the passage of the soul to its goal in Nirvana; and in this beautiful symbolism lies the root of Indian art.

Of course it is probably the case that the use of these symbols originated with very primitive superstitions, but I think there is every reason to believe that they were appropriated and explained by Hindu religious teachers in their own way, just as the Christian churches have adopted many primitive pagan symbols in their ritual. In the symbolism of all religions it is necessary to recognise a process of evolution following the evolution of the religion itself. All Indian symbolism has a double meaning, one appealing to the

popular mind, the other to the philosopher and religious teacher.

When Hindu religious thought had arrived at the idea that the two conditions known as Good and Evil, Life and Death, Creation and Destruction, Beauty and Ugliness, were both part of a divinely appointed order of things, it became necessary to assume a third one, a mean, to maintain the equilibrium of the cosmos between these pairs of opposites.

It is Vishnu, the Preserver, who stands between the opposing forces of good and evil and sees that right prevails in the end. "I will take care that the enemies of the gods shall not partake of the precious draught [of immortality]; that they shall share in the labour alone."

The great cosmic struggle between good and evil, or between gods and demons, is told allegorically in the Mahâbhârata and in the Puranas as the churning of the waters of chaos, the primordial nature-element called the Sea of Milk. It is a very favourite subject with Hindu sculptors and painters.

This is how the story runs:

In consequence of an offence given by Indra, the ruler of the sky, to a powerful *rishi*, who was an incarnation of Siva, all the gods lost virtue; the three regions, earth, sky, and heaven were wholly deprived of prosperity and energy, and the enemies of the gods, the *asuras*, put forth all their strength.

[1] The Vishnu Purana, translated by H. H. Wilson, p. 75.

PLATE III

VISHNU

Instructed by Vishnu, the gods entered into an alliance with the *asuras* in order to obtain the nectar of immortality, *amrita*. They had been told that it must be done by churning the Sea of Milk with the holy mountain, Mandara, the abode of the gods. Ananta, the great serpent on which Vishnu reposed (symbolising eternity) upraised the mountain with the woods thereon and the dwellers in those woods, and brought it to the Sea of Milk, the waters of which were radiant as the thin, shining clouds of autumn. Mandara was the churning-stick; Vishnu himself, in the form of a mighty tortoise, served as a pivot; Ananta was the cord. The gods and *asuras*, having poured into the sea various kinds of medicinal herbs, ranged themselves at either end of the serpent, and the churning began.

Vishnu, manifesting himself in various forms, took part with the gods. As Krishna he had wisely stationed the gods at the tail of the serpent and the *asuras* at the head; so that, scorched by the flames emitted from Ananta's distended hood, the demons were at a disadvantage, while the clouds driven towards his tail by the breath of his mouth, refreshed the gods with revivifying showers. "The Holder of the Mace and Discus [Vishnu] was present in other forms amongst the gods and demons, and assisted to drag the monarch of the serpent race; and in another vast body he sat on the mountain. With one portion of his energy, unseen by gods or demons, he sustained the ser-

pent-king; and with another infused vigour into the gods."

From the Sea of Milk thus churned by gods and demons uprose the divine cow Surabhi, the fountain of milk, first sustenance of the human race. Then came Vârunî, the deity of wine, her eyes rolling with intoxication. Next, from the whirlpool of the deep, came the celestial Pârijâta tree, symbol of all lovely flowers and precious fruits with which the earth is blessed. Then came the joys of dance and song, the *apsarasas*, nymphs of heaven of surprising loveliness, "endowed with beauty and with taste." The cool-rayed moon next rose, and was seized by Mahadeva (Siva).

And then poison was engendered by the churning, which began to overspread the earth with fire and sulphureous fumes. To save creation, Siva, at Brahmâ's request, swallowed the poison and held it in his throat, whence he became thereafter blue-throated (*nila-kantha.*)[1]

At last Dhanwantari, the divine chemist, appeared, robed in white and bearing in his hand the cup of *amrita*. Then seated on a full-blown lotus and holding a lotus in her hand, the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi, radiant with beauty, rose from the waves.[2] "The great sages, enraptured, hymned her with the song dedicated to her praise. Visvawasu and other heavenly quiristers sang, and

[1] This clearly refers to violent volcanic disturbances on the earth in prehistoric times.

[2] See Plate XXI.

Ghritâchî and other celestial nymphs danced before her. Ganga and other holy streams attended for her ablutions; and the elephants of the skies (the clouds) taking up their pure waters in vases of gold, poured them on the goddess, the queen of the universal world." Lakshmi, when bathed, attired, and adorned, threw herself upon the breast of Vishnu, and, there reclining, turned her eyes upon the deities, who were inspired with rapture by her gaze.

The *asuras*, indignant at the preference shown by the lovely goddess, snatched the *amrita* cup from the hand of Dhanwantari; but Vishnu, assuming a female form, fascinated and deluded them, and, having recovered the precious cup, gave it to the gods. The latter, revived by the ambrosial draught, quickly overcame the desperate onslaughts of the demons and drove them to the nether realms of Pâtâla: finally, with great rejoicing, the gods did homage to Vishnu, and, having restored the mountain Mandara to its former base, they left the *amrita* in the safe keeping of Indra and resumed their reign in heaven.[1]

The allegory seems to contain reminiscences of one of those terrible droughts and famines which so often desolate Asiatic countries. *Amrita*, the nectar for which the gods and demons contended, is the rain, of which Indra, the god of the sky whose *vâhan*, or vehicle, is the white elephant (the rain-cloud), is the keeper. Mandara, the churn-

[1] The Vishnu Purana, translated by H. H. Wilson.

ing-stick, stands for the Himâlayas, which attract the monsoon clouds and cause them to discharge their precious nectar, reviving the earth and bringing the beauteous goddess of prosperity to bless mankind. The *apsarasas* are the mists which dance in the morning sunlight.

The subject is a favourite one in Indian art, but it was never treated on so magnificent a scale or with so splendid an effect as in the bas-reliefs which adorn the colonnades of the great temple of Angkor Vat, in Kambodia, built about the twelfth century by Sûrya-varman II., one of the last of the Hindu kings who ruled over the Indian colony in the Further East. The Kambodian temples rank high among the greatest architectural and artistic monuments of the world, though they are as yet little known in Europe.

A detailed description of the Angkor temple is given by Fergusson.[1] Casts of some of the bas-reliefs are in the Royal Ethnographic Museum, Berlin, and in the Trocadéro, Paris, and it is to be regretted that none of our national museums possess any reproductions of these great works. Plate IV. gives the central figure in the relief representing the churning of the ocean, the finest of the series. The grand design of the whole cannot be realised from so small a section, but it may give some idea of its imaginative power and masterful vigour.

The four-armed figure is Vishnu, "the Wielder

[1] "Indian Architecture," Revised Edition 1910, vol. ii., p. 380.

PLATE IV



THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN

of the Mace and Discus," who stands in front of the churning-stick—the mountain Mandara, which is pivoted on the back of the tortoise—controlling the cosmic tug-of-war. The gods and *asuras*, ranged on opposite sides, are using the body of the great serpent Ananta for the churning-rope. In another form Vishnu manifests himself on the top of the churning-stick to maintain its equilibrium. Crowds of attendant spirits are dancing in the air, joyously anticipating the triumph of Vishnu and the gods.

CHAPTER V

THE TRIMÛRTI

THE three conditions, or *gunas*—*i.e.* the opposing extremes and the equilibrating mean, represented allegorically by the gods, the *asuras*, and by Vishnu, were recognised in Hindu philosophy as attributes of the material manifestation of Ishvara, the Supreme Lord.

The famous Hymn of Creation in the Rig-Veda (x. 129) describes the universe as proceeding from the absolute Brahman, the Universal Spirit, the Unknowable, whose first manifestation when passing into a conditioned state—comparable to the passing of a human being from the state of profound sleep to a state of dreaming and then of waking—is called Ishvara. The latter in the Hindu theogony stands nearest to the Western idea of an active, personal God.

The glory of Ishvara as Purusha, or Spirit, makes manifest Prakriti, the Essence of Matter, inherent in Brahman, but until now unmanifested. Purusha, through its divine power called *sakti*, the female principle, causes Prakriti to take form.



THE TRIMÛRTI, ELEPHANTA
(From a photograph by Messrs. Johnston & Hoffman, Calcutta)

Inherent in Prakriti are three attributes, or aspects, known as the Trimûrti, which are symbolised both in Hindu and in Mahâyâna Buddhist sculpture and painting by a male three-headed divinity (Plate V.) or separately as three divinities, Brahmâ, Vishnu, and Siva. In the theogony of Mahâyâna Buddhism the Hindu Trimûrti were identified with Buddha, Sangha, and Dharma respectively.

Each aspect of the Trimûrti is correlated to Purusha and Prakriti as follows: Brahmâ, in relation to Purusha, or Spirit, represents Being, or Truth; as related to Prakriti, or matter, he performs the function of Creator, and represents the condition of activity, or motion. Vishnu, as related to Purusha, represents thought-power; as related to Prakriti, he is the Preserver, representing equilibrium and rhythm. Siva, as related to Purusha, represents Bliss—the joy of creation and the perfect beatitude of Nirvana; but in relation to Prakriti he is the Destroyer, the dissolving power—which connotes, however, the power of regeneration.

This philosophic concept of the evolution of the universe is often symbolised in Hindu art by the figure of Ishvara, under the name of Nârâyana, sleeping on the waters of chaos on the serpent Sesha, or Ananta, "the Endless"—the symbol of eternity, which encircled the world in its vast coils—while Brahmâ, the Creator, appears enthroned upon a mystic lotus-flower, the symbol of purity and heavenly birth, which is growing from Nârâyana's navel.

To understand this allegory it is necessary to know that the physical basis of Hindu metaphysics, upon which its artistic symbolism is founded, is centralised in the apparent movement of the sun round the earth, of which the cosmic cross was the symbol in the ancient Aryan world. The four points of the cross indicated the position of the sun at midnight, sunrise, noon, and at sunset respectively.[1]

Nârâyana sleeping, or absorbed in Yoga, on the primordial waters, is the sun from the time it disappears below the horizon until it rises again. Brahmâ, born from the lotus which grows from Nârâyana's navel, is the sunrise which causes the lotus-flowers to open. Siva, who in the struggle between the *devas* and *asuras*, or between light and darkness, claims the moon for his own, is the sun setting behind the snow-clad Himâlayan peaks, when the moon rises to adorn Mahadeva's brow. Vishnu, the principle of equilibrium, is the sun at noon, standing between Brahmâ and Siva as mediator.

[1] One of the most ancient symbols of Hinduism is the four-headed *lingam*, many examples of which are preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The short pillar on which the heads are displayed cross-wise stands for Ishvara. The four heads are those of the four central deities of the Hindu pantheon (afterwards resolved into three—the Trimûrti), namely, Vishnu, Brahmâ, Sûrya, and Siva. Vishnu, in his dual form, Nârâyana-Vishnu—the one representing his yogic state, the other his active cosmical powers, eventually superseded Sûrya, whose images are often difficult to distinguish from those of Vishnu. The four points of the cosmic cross, starting from the base, thus became Nârâyana, Brahmâ, Vishnu, and Siva.

The circumambulation of a shrine, the most ancient of rites and part of the ritual of Hindu worship at the present day, and the orthodox Brahmin's *sandhya*, or the prayer which he addresses to the Supreme Being at sunrise, noon, and sunset, both belong to the ancient symbolism of sun-worship.

The apparent movement of the sun from east to west was also indicated by the old-world symbol, the swastika, formed by adding four short lines of direction to the four points of the cosmic cross. According to Count D'Alviella it is the exclusive property of the Aryan race. "The ascending movement of the sun naturally represented the whole principle of order and well-being in the universe, and thus the swastika became the symbol of life and of man's material prosperity. The reverse movement, indicated by the sauwastika, was the descending principle, connoting disorder and dissolution."

The philosophic debates in the orthodox Hindu schools eventually resolved the four central deities into three, by identifying Sûrya with Vishnu. Thus was evolved the idea of the Trimûrti, the three aspects of the One, which have their material manifestation in the three cosmic forces, conditions, or *gunas*.

All the innumerable gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are sub-manifestations of the three *gunas*, and Sukracharya, one of the few Sanskrit writers on art whose works are at present known, classifies them as follows :

Sattvik. "An image of God, sitting in meditation in the posture of a yogin, with hands turned, as if granting boon or blessing to his worshippers, surrounded by Indra and other gods praying and worshipping."

Brahmâ, the personification of prayer, is the archetype of *sattvik* images.

Rajasik. "An image seated upon a *vâhan*, or vehicle, adorned with various ornaments with hands holding weapons, as well as granting boon or blessing."

Vishnu, as the Preserver, is the representative of the *rajasik* type.

Tamasik. "A terrible armed figure fighting and destroying demons."

These images are typified by Siva and Dûrgâ.

The imagery and symbolism with which Hindu poets and artists clothed these metaphysical ideas were generally drawn from the wonderful nature of the Himâlayan mountains and valleys. Brahmâ, from being the symbol of sunrise, developed into the personification of prayer, because to the sunrise all the prayers of the Aryan race had been addressed from time immemorial. It was at the end of the winding lotus-stalk growing in the cosmic waters that the lovely flower of the morning sun blossomed. AUM, MANI PADME HUM: "Hail, Lord Creator! the Jewel is in the Lotus," was the invocation of the rising sun expressed in different formularies by all the ancient Aryan world.

As Creator, Brahmâ presided over the fertilising

PLATE VI



BRAHMÂ

element, water. His *vâhan* was appropriately the imperial swan, or the lordly wild goose, which had its home in the Himâlayan lakes.[1] His colour-symbol was red, like the rising sun, whose rays brought life to the sleeping world, and red lotuses were the flowers which his worshippers offered to him.

The finest image of Brahmâ now extant is probably that which is now preserved in the Ethnological Museum, Leyden, Plate VI. It is one of the great monuments of the Brahmanical period of Indian art in Java, which lasted from about 900 to 1500 A.D. The Creator is represented with four heads crowned with massive tiaras, symbolising the four quarters of the earth. Two hands clasped in front hold a phial which contains the divine nectar, the elixir of life: each of the others holds a pilgrim's water-vessel, water being regarded as the creative element. Intertwined with the water-vessel is the sacred lotus, the Creator's floral emblem. Behind the lower part of the figure, unfortunately mutilated, is Brahmâ's *vâhan*, the swan. The arms and body of the deity are ornamented with richly wrought jewellery, and over his left shoulder hangs the sacred thread, the *upavita*, worn by Brahmins.

An awe-inspiring dignity and worshipful solemnity pervade this conception of the Grand-

[1] The Sanskrit word for a swan, or goose, *hamsa*, is convertible into SA—HAM = I AM HE, *i.e.* Brahmâ. In poetry the flight of the swan is compared to that of the parting soul.

sire of the human race, the Dyaus-pitar, Heavenly Father, Giver of Life and Receiver of all prayers. In the presence of great art like this it is mere impertinence to inquire whether such conventions as four heads and arms are permissible. In this case the end which the artist had in view is attained, and the conventions are justified thereby. The test of good art, as Rodin has said, is that the eye shall be perfectly satisfied. Here there is nothing that can be taken away, and nothing that can be added. One can only say that the artist has attained to his ideal, and that ideal is noble and sufficient. No human art is absolute and final; it is only the *dilettante* who delights in fixing rules for it to bring it within the compass of his own understanding.

It may be granted that it is only in truly inspired art that such transcendental conceptions of the godlike can be tolerated from a purely æsthetic standpoint, but it is just the privilege of genius to break away from the limitations which bind mediocrity. Hindu art has been judged in Europe, particularly in England, not by these masterpieces of the pre-Muhammadan epoch, but by the puerile illustrations of the Hindu pantheon given by Moor and other still more prejudiced writers, or by debased modern types collected at South Kensington and elsewhere. It is as if an Indian critic were to judge the art of the Renaissance in Europe by the garden gods and goddesses now imported into India as Italian art.

Vishnu, the Preserver (Plate III.), the second of the Trimûrti, ruled over the firmament, and his colour is the deep transparent blue, pure as crystal, of the Himâlayan sky when it has been swept by the monsoon storms. His upright, rigid, columnar pose fitly expresses his character as the Pillar of the universe; and what could better express his sustaining, equilibrating power than his *vâhan*, Garuda, the eagle with outstretched wings, poised motionless in mid-heaven over a Himâlayan valley?[1]

The sun which sustains the universe was his chief emblem, and perhaps the original idea of the many-armed images which represented Vishnu (Plate XX.) was to suggest the all-pervading rays of the midday sun. His *chakra*, the Wheel of Life, which, like the Buddhist Wheel of the Law, seems to have been evolved from the swastika, symbolised not the sun itself but its apparent revolution round the earth. It generally has the cosmic cross placed within it (Plate III.). The Upanishads thus explain its mystical meaning:

"As the spokes of a wheel are attached to the nave, so are all things attached to Life. This Life ought to be approached with faith and reverence,

[1] Akbar's Hindu architects used the idea of the cosmic pillar in the Diwan-i-khâs at Fatehpur-sikri, raising the imperial throne upon a column with a colossal bracketed capital which was approached from a gallery by four gangways symbolising the four quarters of the earth. A cast of it is in the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington.

and viewed as an immensity which abides in its own glory. That immensity extended from above, from below, from behind and from before, from the south and from the north. It is the soul of the universe; it is God Himself."[1]

Vishnu is also represented by the tree whose trunk is the upright limb of the cosmic cross. It has its branches, leaves, and fruit in the starry heavens. This is analogous to the Buddhist symbolism in which the heavenly dome is likened to an umbrella; a series of umbrellas superimposed forming the "tee" placed on the top of a *stûpa* to represent the different spheres or planes through which the soul ascends to Nirvana.

The image of Vishnu in Plate III. is another striking example of Hindu sculpture in Java which is fully equal to the finest Buddhist art at Bôrôbudûr. The rigid uprightness of the figure is clearly intended to express Vishnu's special manifestation as the cosmic pillar, or tree, as the Preserver who keeps the balance between the contending forces of light and darkness, rather than the universal attributes which are assigned to him by the Vaishnavaite sect in modern Hinduism.

He is here represented with four arms, instead of eight, which are used to emphasise by repetition the columnar uprightness of the body. The attributes displayed are the discus, or *chakra*, and the mace, *gadha*, on the right side; on

[1] Translated by Monier Williams.

the left, the conch-shell, and another which is broken.[1]

The third of the Trimûrti,[2] Siva, the Destroyer, Regenerator, and Lord of Bliss, found a fitting material symbol in the snow-clad mountain-peak. Fire was his element, at once destructive, purifying, and regenerative. Possibly some active volcano in the Himâlayan regions may have first suggested this association; but Siva's destructive forces would be sufficiently represented by the fury of Himâlayan storms and by the desolation caused by the frequent earthquakes which rent the mountain-sides. Nothing could more finely symbolise the spiritual power of meditation than the serene majesty of the highest Himâlayan peaks in the morning sunlight, when Siva's "blue-throat" is seen beneath the snow-line; or at dusk, when the crescent moon which adorns the great god's brow rises in mystic beauty over the snowy ridge. The white ashes of the sacrificial fire and the blue throat of the flame are analogous symbols.

The cobra became Siva's especial emblem because, while its spiral coil represented the principle of cosmic evolution, or of life, the deadly poison contained in its fangs represented the principle of involution, or death; and its habit of shedding its skin periodically was a symbol of reincarnation, or rebirth.

[1] The mystical meaning of Vishnu's attributes are explained in detail in the description of Plate XX., Part II., below.

[2] In the great sculpture at Elephanta, Plate V., Siva appears in the middle of the Trimûrti. This interchange of symbolism is explained farther on.

Siva's *vâhan* was the bull, Nandi, which carried the sacrificial wood, and also symbolised his generative force. On the spiritual plane Nandi represents *dharma*, or the whole duty of the Hindu. The Ganges and other sacred rivers which flowed from Himâlayan glaciers through the mountain forests, "the great god's hair," were naturally associated with the idea of spiritual purity represented by Siva himself.

The philosophical concept of the Trimûrti, the three Aspects of the Supreme, correlated with the three *gunas* or conditions inherent in Prakriti, affords a common basis of belief for all Hindu sects; but the two deities, Vishnu and Siva, gradually absorbed the special attributes of Brahmâ, who, as the chief divinity of a sect, ceased to claim many votaries for two reasons: first, because, as a symbol of prayer, he was held to be present in all worship; secondly, because, as a symbol of creation, his special work in the cosmos was finished and he could no longer be moved by prayer. At the present time there are not more than one or two temples specially dedicated to Brahmâ in the whole of India, though his image often appears in the temples of other sects.

This process of absorption resolved orthodox Hinduism into the two main sects which exist at the present day; the Vaishnavaites, the devotees of Vishnu, who are in a majority in Northern India; the Saivaites, those of Siva, who are most numerous in the South. The Sauras, or wor-

shippers of Sûrya, still remain as a distinct sect, but it is not a numerous one. The images of Sûrya are often identical with those of Vishnu.

Vishnu to the Vaishnavaites is Brahmâ, Vishnu, and Siva. In the same way Siva, to the Saivaites, represents the whole Trimûrti. This interchange of symbols between different sects often makes Indian religious ideas seem tangled and confused to Europeans. It should always be remembered, not only that any one of the Trimûrti may stand for all three, but that any Hindu deity may be regarded as a symbol or manifestation of all the powers of the One God.

Vishnu in his universal character has ten *avataras*, incarnations, or "descents," in which he manifested himself to the world. In the first, the Matsya, or fish-incarnation, he is said to have saved Manu, one of the progenitors of the human race, from a great flood. In the second, the Kurma, or tortoise-incarnation, he assisted in the churning of the ocean. The next was the Varâha, or boar-incarnation, in which Vishnu raised the earth from beneath the waters of chaos, or, according to a Puranic legend, rescued it from a demon who had dragged it beneath the sea. The Narasinha, or man-lion incarnation, was the form in which he is said to have appeared to destroy the wicked king Hiranya-kaçipu. This is the subject of one of the most dramatic of the Ellora sculptures.[1] The fifth incarnation, known as the Vamana, or

[1] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XXII.

dwarf, refers to the "three strides of Vishnu," or the three positions of the sun at rising, at noon, and at setting. In the Puranas he is said to have assumed the form of a dwarf to recover the dominion of the earth from a demon-king, Bali.

The four historical or quasi-historical *avataras* are those of Parasu-Râma, or Râma with the axe—a Brahmin who overthrew the Kshatriyas and established Brahmin supremacy in Northern India; Râma Chandra, the hero of the Râmâyana; Krishna, the hero of the Mahâbhârata and the inspired teacher of the Bhagavad-Gitâ; and Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.

The tenth and last *avatar* is that of the Hindu Messiah, Kalkin, who at the end of the present dark age, the Kâlî Yuga, is to appear riding a white horse, with a flaming sword in hand, to restore righteousness and to rule the earth.

The passage from the Bhagavad-Gitâ quoted above[1] is one of the grandest descriptions in Hindu literature of Vishnu's universal form and attributes. In sculpture this conception of Vishnu is very finely rendered in the Mâmallapuram relief, Plate XX. In popular Hindu art of the present day, especially in Northern India, the favourite subjects are the allegorical legends relating to Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna, his exploits as the destroyer of demons and wicked men, his sports with the *gopîs*, and the beautiful episode of Radha's devotion.

[1] Page 56.

PLATE VII



SIVA AS NÂTARÂJA: FRONT VIEW

Siva, as the supreme deity of the Saivaites, is generally known as Mahadeva, the Great God. In sculpture he appears sometimes as the Great Yogi, wrapt in meditation like the Buddha; sometimes in his terrific aspect as Bhairava. One of the most inspired conceptions of Hindu art is that of Siva as the Universal Lord, or the Soul of the Universe manifesting itself in matter, in his mystic dance of creation, symbolising the perfect joy which God feels in the creation which He makes, controls, destroys, and renews at will. The Puranas record various legends which develop allegorically this fundamental concept of the cosmic rhythm. Siva, it is said, to please his consort Parvati, performed this dance, called the Tândavan, in the presence of all the devas, to the accompaniment of the celestial drum, which, like Vishnu's conch-shell trumpet, is the symbol of vibration, the creative force. This is the subject of the magnificent fragment from Elephanta, illustrated in Plate XXVIII., and of the Ellora sculpture, Plate XXIX.

He is said to have also performed this dance on the prostrate body of the demon-dwarf Tripura, representing the world, the flesh, and the devil, who was sent by some envious sages to attack him. This is the usual form in which Siva is represented in South Indian bronzes, of which the Madras Museum has two superb examples. One of them has been illustrated in my "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XXV.; the other is shown here in Plates VII. and VIII. In composition these two

bronzes are almost identical, but in the latter the aura of flame surrounding the figure, and the waving locks of matted hair, symbolising the sacred rivers which flowed over Mahadeva's head, are broken away. There is, however, a great difference in the feeling which animates the two.

In both of them Siva has four arms, instead of eight, as in the Elephanta and Ellora sculptures. In the uppermost right hand is held a small hour-glass-shaped drum, the symbol of vibration, or the life-principle. The corresponding left hand holds the sacred purifying fire, symbol both of the destruction of the body and of the heavenly grace which the soul may gain thereby. In the lobe of the right ear there is a woman's ornament, in the left a man's earring: by which is expressed the nature of the Deity, combining both the male and female principle.

There is a great contrast between the elegant grace of this most delightful bronze and the vehement, overpowering energy of the Elephanta and Ellora bas-reliefs. There is less of the divine and more of mundane feeling in its youthful, almost feminine lightness and gaiety. We feel that the sculptor was chiefly absorbed in the effort to express the abandon of youth yielding itself wholly to the rhythm and ecstasy of the dance. In this joyous, spontaneous mood, it is much more akin to Greek art than the trivial, decadent sculpture of Gandhara, to which many critics would attribute the source of Indian artistic inspiration.

PLATE VIII



SIVA AS NÂTARÂJA: BACK VIEW

And certainly a Pompeian or Tanagran sculptor, or their disciples of the Italian Renaissance, would be more proud to acknowledge a kindred feeling in the perfect art of this South Indian image-maker than to claim relationship with the mostly insipid and mechanical work of Kanishka's hireling stone-masons.

It is difficult at present to date these bronzes with any degree of certainty. They are undoubtedly much later than the Mâmallapuram sculptures, and later than those of Ellora; but they are considerably earlier than the great temple of Madura, the sculptures of which in many cases betray strong Western influence. Târanâtha, in his brief sketch of Indian art-history, written about A.D. 1608,[1] mentions three skilful South Indian image-makers: Jaya, Parojaya, and Vijaya. Possibly the Madras Museum bronzes may be the work of one of these artists.

The symbolism conveyed in one of the chief agents of Siva's destructive power, his son, Karttikeya, the god of war, needs no explanation. He has for his *vâhan* the peacock, an appropriate emblem for the pride, pomp, and circumstance of war. The superbly decorative composition showing Karttikeya in his war-chariot, flying like a whirlwind to battle, given in Plate IX., is a portion of one of the Kambodian reliefs from a cast in the Trocadéro, Paris.

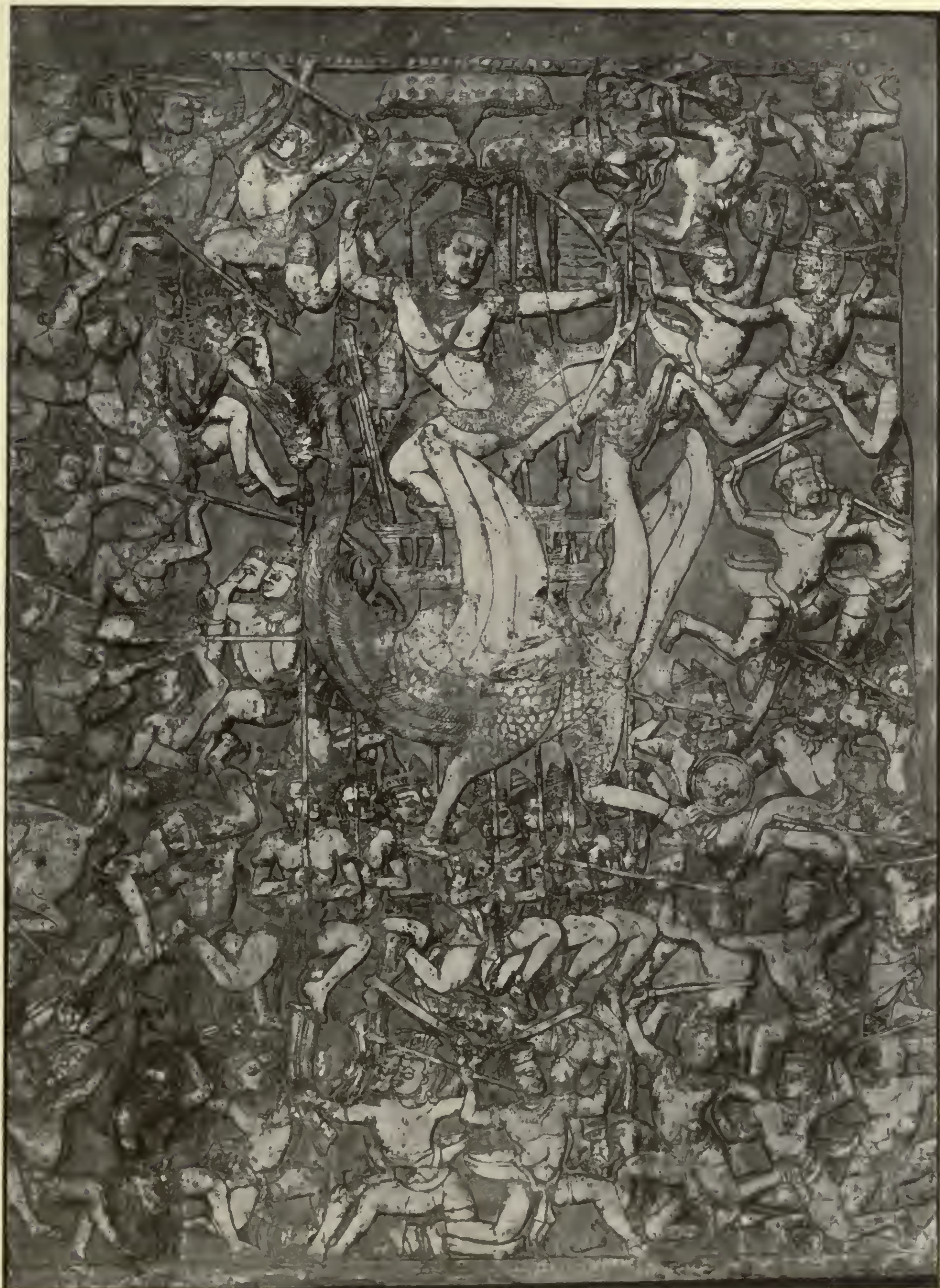
The other progeny of Siva is the dwarf,

[1] See "Indian Sculpture and Painting," pp. 76–81.

grotesque Ganesha, who is the god of intellectuality, of worldly wisdom, Lord of the lesser divinities, protector of households, and patron of authors. The Puranas record his birth on this wise. Parvati, the wife of Siva, was having her bath in her lord's absence, and for the sake of privacy fashioned Ganesha from the turmeric paste with which she had anointed her body, and set him down at the door to keep off intruders. Siva, unexpectedly returning, found his entrance barred by the unknown doorkeeper, and in a rage cut off his head. Parvati was irate at his rashness, and would not be pacified until Siva had promised to restore Ganesha to life. The latter's head could not be found, so Siva went off into the forest and found an elephant sleeping with his head turned towards the north—the direction of his Himâlayan paradise. He thought this would serve for the head of his supposititious son, so he severed it and fitted it on to the body of Ganesha: thus fulfilling his promise, though in a rather unexpected and incongruous fashion.

The meaning of the allegory is clear. Ganesha, who is the protector of households, represents the wisdom which brings to mankind a great store of this world's goods; the sagacity of an elephant which keeps the mind tied to earth, not the spiritual power of Siva, which can take wings and lift the soul to heaven: wherefore he is the patron deity of scribes and publishers. He was not born of the perfect union of the Soul and Matter, Purusha

PLATE IX



KARTTIKEYA

and Prakriti, but was fashioned from the dross of Mother Earth, and his vehicle is the mean, earth-burrowing creature, the rat. Nevertheless, he is a jovial, well-disposed deity, and always immensely popular; and, as the intuitive intellectual power must always be joined with reason, so, by permission of the gods, Ganesha's name is always to be invoked first in sacrifices.

The same device of gentle ridicule for conveying a moral lesson is used in the story of Daksha, as told in the Puranas. In this case the moral conveyed is the inefficacy of sacrifices when directed towards selfish or unworthy objects. The explanation usually given that the story refers to sectarian disputes between the followers of Vishnu and Siva seems to me to miss the whole point of it.

Daksha is the personification of intellectual pride: his name signifies "ability," and he was said to be one of the progenitors of the human race. He had twenty-four fair daughters, who are personifications of respectability and all the domestic virtues. Among them, however, Sati, or Truth—the essence of spirituality—was passionately devoted to Siva, and, though he appeared as a ragged ascetic, besmeared in ashes and with matted hair, she chose him as her husband in preference to many other powerful and wealthy suitors.

This incensed her father, who was worldly-wise and would only pay respect to the Preserver,

Vishnu, the bestower of wealth, happiness, and prosperity. Daksha had arranged for a grand horse-sacrifice, to which all the *devas*, except Siva, were invited. Sati, though uninvited, attended the feast, but, unable to bear the insults which Daksha flung at Siva and herself, she fell dead at her father's feet.

Siva, then, assuming one of his terrific forms as the Destroyer, summoned all his hosts, and in a furious combat defeated and slew Daksha, though the latter was assisted by other *devas*, and carried off the body of Sati. The whole world was convulsed with the great god's grief and was threatened with dissolution, until Vishnu, with his discus, cut the body of Sati into pieces, which fell upon the earth. Siva, relieved of his burden, returned to meditation in his Himâlayan paradise.

Sati was subsequently reborn and again became Siva's bride as Umâ, or Parvati, the fair daughter of Himâlaya. At the intercession of Sati's mother Daksha was restored to life; but, as his head could not be found, it was replaced by that of a goat. The animal chosen, as in the case of Ganesha, points the moral of the story—the goat is the animal most frequently offered in Hindu sacrifices.

Like the fine sculpture of the same deity now in the Ethnographic Museum at Leyden,[1] the monumental image of Ganesha shown in Plate X. comes from Java. Ganesha is generally treated as the

[1] See "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XXVII.

PLATE X



GANESHA

Indian counterpart of the Falstaff among Chinese household gods, the round-bellied god of good luck. It would hardly occur to the Western mind that such uncompromising artistic materials as those provided by the Puranic myth—a decapitated infant's body furnished anew with the head of an elephant—could be treated otherwise than as a subject *pour rire*, a grotesque, belonging to the category of the decorative rather than the "fine" arts, according to our arbitrary and misleading modern classification.

But Indian genius has here risen above pedantic prescription and given us a really noble conception of Ganesha in a serious mood, as a personification of man's animal nature, imbued with something of the mystery of the Sphinx and a certain supernatural solemnity, carried out with magnificent strength and breadth of modelling. Ganesha is a symbol of social order and stability: an apotheosis of all the qualities which man shares with the animal creation. Siva is the symbol of the soul—Âtman; Ganesha, his son, stands for Manas, the mind.

The metaphysical ideas represented by Hindu images are often symbolised more abstractly by geometric signs; for the philosophic Hindu is often as averse to the naturalistic forms of symbolism as the most furious iconoclast of Christianity or of Islam. The laws of Manu associate the Brahmins who have charge of temple images with thieves and all sorts of disreputable persons; and even at

the present day they are, as a class, held in the greatest contempt by the learned *pandit*. It was probably Græco-Roman influence, acting upon Buddhism, which enlarged enormously the Hindu pantheon and reconciled orthodox Hindu thought to the worship of images as a spiritual aid, more especially for those who were intellectually deficient or too uncultured to understand the metaphysics of esoteric Hinduism.

In this geometric symbolism God, the Absolute or Unknowable, is represented by a point, or dot (*parm*), which is one of the Hindu sectarial marks. The symbol of God manifested in the cosmos is an equilateral triangle, the three sides of which may be taken to represent the Trimûrti. When the triangle stands on its apex it signifies expansion, or evolution, and, like the swastika, the ascending creative force—or life. It is also the symbol of water as the creative element, and is adopted by Vaishnavaites as the symbol of Nârâyana-Vishnu. The triangle reversed, or standing on its base, signifies involution, or contraction, and hence fire, as the destructive element. It is one of the symbols of Siva.

The two triangles intersecting form the mystic lotus, known as King Solomon's Seal, the seat of Brahmâ, the casket which contained the Jewel of Life. It was also the symbol of the cosmic element, ether.

The spiral was another geometric symbol of evolutionary force, represented in nature by the

whirling of dust-storms and waterspouts, the eddying of whirlpools, or the wreaths of evaporation in water, the curling of smoke, and in Hindu allegory by the Churning of the Cosmic Ocean. It is represented in Hindu art by the coiled, or gliding snake, the antelope's and ram's horn, the conch-shell of Vishnu and the *sri-vatsa* curl on his breast, the *salagram* stone, Nârâyana's navel, and the winding stalk of the lotus.

The mystic syllable AUM was also represented by a spiral symbol which is sculptured on one of the Elephanta reliefs.[1]

The spiral, together with the swastika and sauwastika, and the parallel symbols of the equilateral triangles, and the three steps of Vishnu, provide the basis of innumerable intersecting patterns in Asiatic decorative art; but this is a subject beyond the scope of my present inquiry.

Another aniconic symbol, Siva's *lingam*, which in Northern India has almost universally taken the place of quasi-anthropomorphic symbols, was in all probability originally derived from the votive *stûpa* of Buddhism. In Saivaite symbolism it represents the same ideas as those which are associated with the cosmic Tree, or Pillar, and the churning-stick of Vishnu, *i.e.* it stands for the pivot or the axis of cosmic forces, like the "poles" of the earth; or for the pillar of the cosmic ascent, at the foot of which is the joy of creation, at the

[1] See also Alberuni's "India," vol. i. p. 173. Trübner's Oriental Series.

summit the bliss of Nirvana. According to a Saivaite myth both Brahmâ and Vishnu failed in their attempt to measure it: for who but Mahadeva Himself could reach to the height of the heavens or fathom the depths of hell? Though phallic associations are undoubtedly connected with it popularly, to the cultured Hindu it is only suggestive of the philosophic concept that God is a point, formless, or that He is the One.

The ideas connected with sex symbolism in Hindu art and ritual are generally misinterpreted by those who take them out of the environment of Indian social life. In the Upanishads sexual relationship is described as one of the means of apprehending the divine nature, and throughout oriental literature it is constantly used metaphorically to express the true relationship between the human soul and God.

The words of Sir M. Monier-Williams are very applicable to the whole question of sex symbolism in Indian religious art: "In India the relation between the sexes is regarded as a sacred mystery, and is never held to be suggestive of improper or indecent ideas."

H. H. Wilson also says: "Whatever may have been the origin of this form of worship in India, the notions upon which it was founded, according to the impure fancies of European writers, are not to be traced in even the Saiva Puranas."[1]

[1] "Vishnu Purana," Preface, p. xliv.

CHAPTER VI

THE FEMININE IDEAL

HAVING seen how the male human figure in Indian art is used to symbolise the nature of Divinity, we will pass on to consider the feminine ideal. Purusha and Prakriti, Soul and Matter, are held to be inert in themselves, so each of the Trimûrti has its *sakti* or *saktis*, divine powers representing the female principle, which enable them to perform their functions in the universe. Expressed in concrete forms, the female counterpart, or wife, of Brahmâ, the Creator, is the goddess Saraswati, who symbolises learning and wisdom, and is the patroness of the fine arts. Similarly, the *sakti* of Vishnu the Preserver, is Lakshmi, or Sri, who symbolises earthly prosperity, or good fortune. The *saktis* of Siva, as the Destroyer, are Durgâ, Gâuri, and other fighting goddesses, destroyers of demons, to propitiate whom bloody sacrifices, and sometimes human victims, are offered ; but in his benign aspect the *sakti* of Siva is Umâ, or Parvati, daughter of Himâlaya, symbolising spirituality and purity (Plate XI. and frontispiece).

In Kâlî, the Ender of Time and Giver of Nirvana, the female principle is worshipped as the Mother of all the Gods. As the *sakti* of Siva in his aspect as Mahâ-kal, Time, it is Kâlî who, at the end of a cosmic cycle, destroys even her own husband and dissolves all the worlds, reducing nature and all the *devas* to their formless, unconditioned state, when Nârâyana reposes again on the primordial waters. The "Nirvana Tantram" says: "As the lightning is born from the cloud and disappears within the cloud, so Brahmâ and all other gods take birth from Kâlî and will disappear in Kâlî." Her images are always black because "as all colours, white, yellow, and others, are absorbed in black, so all the elements are in the end absorbed in Kâlî; and as the absence of all colours is black, so Kâlî is represented black in order to teach the worshipper that the goddess is without substance and without *gunas*."

This conception of Kâlî does not, however, appear to have been prominent in the great period of Indian sculpture, when Parvati appears most frequently as Siva's consort, and the modern artistic representations of her are generally of the most puerile description.

Though intermediate between soul and matter, and except in the case of Kâlî rarely considered as having an entity apart from the male, the female principle is nevertheless regarded as the most potent force in creation, being representative of the Energy, Power, or Virtue which manifests

PLATE XI



PARVATI

itself throughout the universe in qualities both benign and malignant, various, elusive, and contrary as the elements of woman's nature, which an Indian legend of the creation, gracefully paraphrased by Mr. Bain, summarises thus :

In the beginning, when Twashtri [the Divine Artificer] came to the creation of woman he found that he had exhausted his materials in the making of man and that no solid elements were left. In this dilemma, after profound meditation, he did as follows. He took the rotundity of the moon and the curves of creepers, and the clinging of tendrils, and the trembling of grass, and the slenderness of the reed, and the bloom of flowers, and the lightness of leaves, and the tapering of the elephant's trunk, and the glances of deer, and the clustering of rows of bees, and the joyous gaiety of sunbeams, and the weeping of clouds, and the fickleness of the winds, and the timidity of the hare, and the vanity of the peacock, and the softness of the parrot's bosom, and the hardness of adamant, and the sweetness of honey, and the cruelty of the tiger, and the warm glow of fire, and the coldness of snow, and the chattering of jays, and the cooing of the *kokila*, and the hypocrisy of the crane, and the fidelity of the *chakrawaka*; and, compounding all these together, he made woman and gave her to man."[1]

In early Indian sculpture and painting, before the metaphysical idea of *sakti* began to be represented in female form, there is no super-woman.

[1] "A Digit of the Moon," pp. 13, 14.

At Bharhut and Sânchî both men and women are represented in a purely naturalistic manner; and at Amarâvatî, where aristocratic or divine birth in the male sex is symbolised by the superhuman body, the female form still continues to be treated entirely naturalistically.

The ideal of the independent sportswoman, as the virgin goddess Diana, patroness of the chase, has no counterpart in Indian art; though as the slayer of demons, Durgâ, and as Kâlî, the Destroyer, the feminine principle in Hindu theogony is given its ferocious aspect. Hunting has always been a royal sport in India, as in all other countries, but it has never been glorified into a national cult, and the sacredness and unity of all life were principles recognised by every Indian school of religious teaching, even by those which did not distinctly forbid the killing of animals for food. Until the Muhammadan conquest, hunting was never such a favourite theme with Indian artists as it was in Assyria and ancient Iran; animals are either the object of worship themselves or they join with men, as their fellow-creatures, in worshipping at the sacred shrine the Source of all life.

When the Indian woman, from whatever impulse it might be, sought emancipation from social or domestic conventions and restraints, it was to claim equality with men in the spiritual, not the worldly life. What Mrs. Rhys Davids says of the early Buddhist sisterhood is true of Indian womanhood in general:

"To gain this free mobility, *pace* the deeper liberty, they, like their later Christian sisters, had laid down all social position, all domestic success; they had lost their world. But in exchange they had won the status of an individual in place of being adjuncts, however much admired, fostered, and sheltered they might, as such, have been. 'With shaven head, wrapt in their robe'—a dress indistinguishable, it would seem, from the swathing toga and swathed undergarments of the male *religieux*—the Sisters were free to come and go, to dive alone into the depths of the wood, or climb aloft."[1]

And Mrs. Rhys Davids's comment that, "in Buddhist hagiology there is no premium placed on the state of virginity as such,"[2] may be taken as having general application to Indian women also. The ideal of feminine purity and all the consecrations of womanhood in Indian thought are centred first in the chaste wife and mother, and next in the *religieuse*, whether she be virgin or widow. Virginity, in itself, is only a calamity which needs the solace and protection of religion. Another of the Indian legends of Creation paraphrased by Mr. Bain says that woman was made out of the reflections of man, when the latter sought companionship by looking at himself in pools of water. "The woman, as soon as she was made, began to cry, and she said, 'Alas! alas! I am, and I not.' Then said the Creator: 'Thou foolish

[1] "Psalms of the Sisters," Introduction, p. xxv (Henry Frowde).

[2] *Ibid.* p. xxxiii.

intermediate creature, thou art a nonentity only when thou standest alone. But when thou art united to man thou art real in participation with his substance.' And thus, apart from her husband a woman is a nonentity, and a shadow without a substance; being nothing but the image of himself reflected in the mirror of illusion."[1]

The type of female beauty most common in Indian art is, therefore, that of the young matron with breasts "like a pair of golden gourds" and "hips like the swell of a river-bank." Not that Indian artists were indifferent to the charm of less mature womanhood, but social custom imposed a stigma upon the unmarried state, and physical beauty by itself is not the ideal of Indian art. Greek artists were satisfied that perfect human beauty, in both sexes, was in itself the type of divine beauty and all-sufficient for man's conception of divinity; but in Indian thought divine beauty transcends all the ideals of human perfection.

Indian poets, like all others, extol the beauty of the female form, but these physical charms are snares which disturb holy men in their devotions, spoil their sacrifices, and keep their thoughts tied to this earth. There is a fatal fascination in the beauty of the voluptuous *apsarasas*, the courtesans of the gods—

> With all the gifts of grace and youth and beauty,
> . . . . yet thus fair,
> Nor god nor demon sought their wedded love—

[1] "In the Great God's Hair," p. 35.

PLATE XII



A YOUNG WOMAN PRESSING THE ASOKA-TREE WITH HER FOOT

and they are often represented in Indian sculpture. A good example is shown in Plate XII., a bas-relief from an Orissan temple, probably of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, in which the swelling bosom, rounded hips, and the clinging, serpentine grace of the limbs, typical of the Indian feminine ideal, are admirably rendered.

But such types, familiar as they are in Indian art, do not express the highest Indian ideal. Even Umâ, the lovely daughter of Himâlaya, could not win Siva for her husband until Kâma, the god of love, had been burnt to ashes in the fire of the Great God's eyes, and she had proved her devotion by long and trying penances. The cult of the nude female, on which all modern academic art in Europe is based, can therefore bring no inspiration to India.

It is upon spiritual beauty that the Indian artist is always insisting. Purusha, spirit, is the male principle, and the highest type of divine beauty is symbolised by the male figure, the beauty of the female divinity being considered as the reflection, or counterpart of the male form. It would be more exact to say that, in the images of Buddha and the Jain Tirthankaras, Indian artists were aiming at a divine type which combined all the physical perfections of male and female, and transcended them both. The broad shoulders and lion-like body were derived from masculine characteristics, and the rounded limbs, smooth skin without veins, the joints with the bones

hardly showing, represented those of the other sex. Afterwards, when Mahâyâna Buddhism provided Buddha with a female counterpart, Indian artists made the new type of divinity conform to the original divine ideal, only adding the most prominent sexual characteristics to distinguish it from the other. Thus was created the ideal super-woman, of which the beautiful figure of Prajnâparamitâ[1] from Java is a type. The sexual characteristics became more prominent in Hindu female divinities, such as Parvati and Lakshmi, and in their Buddhist counterparts, the different manifestations of Târâ.

Both of the illustrations given in Plate XI. and in the frontispiece show the feminine divine ideal in the person of Parvati, the Earth Mother. The former, from a South Indian bronze figure of uncertain date, now in the National Museum at Copenhagen, represents her crowned as the consort of Siva; the latter is related to the myth of Umâ's betrothal to Siva, as told in the poem of Kalidâsa, the "Kumara-sambhava." It belongs to the style of temple-sculpture known as Chalukyan, from the dynasties of that name which ruled over the provinces now known as Hyderabad, Mysore, and Dhârwâr. The style reached its greatest perfection in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to which epoch this sculpture belongs: it is related to the early Dravidian style of Mâmallapuram in much the same way as late Decorated Gothic is

[1] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XIV.

related to Early English. The finest examples now remaining are perhaps the great temple at Ittagi, in Hyderabad, and those at Lakkundi and at Kuruvatti, near Harpanahalli.[1] The more famous Hoysaleshvara temple at Halebîd, though cited by Fergusson as the best of its class, is as regards sculpture a decadent example, exhibiting all those faults of over-elaboration and rococo extravagance in decoration which European critics are too prone to associate with Indian art generally.

The frontispiece illustrates oneof thetwogroups of figures placed in front and at the side of the capital of a pilaster at the east entrance of the temple at Kuruvatti. It is no less remarkable as a technical *tour de force* than for its artistic beauty, though the purist might object that the treatment of the material is more suitable for metal than for stone. The principal figure, Parvati, or Umâ, the daughter of Himâlaya, is dancing to the accompaniment of the pipe played with intense feeling by the boy on her left. It is not that tremendous dance of Siva, the Tândavan, with which he sets the worlds in motion and hurls them to destruction, but the gentle, swaying rhythm of the nautch which the *gopîs* danced with Krishna in the pastures of Brindâban, like the soft airs of spring which played among the trees of Himâlaya when Umâ

[1] See Fergusson's "History of Indian Architecture," Revised Edition, 1810, vol. i. book iv. chapter i.; and Rea's "Chalukyan Architecture."

came with the god of love to lure the Great Ascetic from his meditations:

> Bright flowers of spring, in every lovely hue,
> Around the lady's form rare beauty threw.
> Some clasped her neck like strings of purest pearls,
> Some shot their glory through her wavy curls,
> Bending her graceful head, as half oppressed
> With swelling charms even too richly blest.
> Fancy might deem that beautiful young maiden
> Some slender tree with its sweet flowers o'erladen.[1]

In this wonderfully animated and festive group, as fine in human sentiment as it is decorative in beauty, the sculptor has entered heart and soul into the spirit of Kalidâsa's verse. Very charming is the modest, half-shy expression of the beautifully poised oval head; the robust, rich modelling of the goddess's body gives the true Indian ideal of ripe young womanhood, the full bosom, the slender waist, the swelling hips, and the tapering limbs. The joyous rhythm of the dance vibrates through the whole group like the breath of spring, in the magnificent swing of Parvati's body, like a young forest-tree swaying in the wind, in the varied curves of her richly wrought ornaments, in the fluttering tassels, and in the delightful little figures which balance the composition on either side.

The sculptor has enhanced the feeling of lightness and gaiety by converting the aureole, the symbol of divinity behind the goddess, into a flow-

[1] "The Birth of the War-god," by Kalidâsa. Translated by R. H. W. Griffith.

ing wreath, or scroll, which in the gracefulness of its design and perfect execution is not the least beautiful touch in this remarkable work, though the right half of it has been broken.

Most of the marks of female beauty enumerated by Indian poets, such as the navel low in the body, eyes like a lotus-petal, face like the full moon, the lines on the neck resembling those on the conch-shell, and the slender waist, were equally attributes of male beauty, and were included in the *lakshanas* or beauty-marks, prescribed for images of Buddha and the Jain Tirthankaras. Even the practice of tight lacing would seem from the evidence of the Cretan sculptures to have been originally a masculine and not feminine vanity: the purpose of it being, as I have explained, to make the male body conform to the artistic ideal of a mighty hunter.

The description of Draupadi's charms in the Mahâbhârata is a typical poetic description of Indian feminine beauty. When she came in disguise to Sudeshnâ, the wife of king Virâta, offering herself as a servant, the Queen, in astonishment, enumerates all the charms of her person, declaring that so much beauty was quite incompatible with her professed occupation:

"You might indeed," said the Queen, "be the mistress of servants, both male and female. Your heels are not prominent, and your thighs touch each other. You have great intelligence, your navel is deep, and your words are well-chosen. And your great-toes, bosom and hips and dorsa,

and toe-nails and palms of your hands are all well developed. And the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet and your face are ruddy. And your speech is sweet, even as the voice of a swan. And your hair is beautiful, your bosom shapely, and you are possessed of the highest grace; and, like a Kashmerean mare, you are furnished with every auspicious mark. Your eye-lashes are beautifully bent, your lip is like the ruddy gourd. Your waist is slender, and the lines of your neck are like those upon a conch-shell. And your veins are scarcely visible. Indeed your countenance is like the full moon, your eyes resemble the petals of the autumnal lotus, and your body is fragrant like the lotus itself. Surely in beauty you resemble Sri herself, whose seat is the autumnal lotus. Tell me, beautiful damsel, who thou art! Thou canst never be a maid-servant. Art thou a Yakshi, a goddess, a Gandharvi, or an *Apsarâ*? Art thou the daughter of a celestial, or art thou a Nâgini? Art thou the guardian goddess of some city, a Vidyâdara, or Kinnari, or art thou Rohini herself?"

A pretty animistic conceit, which affords a favourite *motif* for Indian poets, dramatists, and artists, is that which makes the asoka-tree burst into flower when touched by the foot of a beautiful woman.

It may be, as Mr. Abanindro Nath Tagore has suggested, an allegory of the reawakening of nature on the approach of spring; like the story of the marriage of Umâ and Siva, as told by Kalidâsa in the "Kumara-sambhava."

PLATE XIII



SCULPTURE FROM THE TADPATRI TEMPLE, MADRAS
(From a photograph by Messrs. Nicholas & Co., Madras)

The whole of the third act of Kalidâsa's play, *Malikâgnimitra*, is founded upon it. Dharini, the first Queen of Agnimitra, had been told that an asoka-tree in her palace garden was languishing. She therefore sends her beautiful handmaiden, Malika, to revive it, as she herself had sprained her ankle in falling from a swing. The King, who is deeply smitten with Malika's charms, is in the garden when she comes to fulfil the Queen's commands, and hides himself, together with a courtier, his confidant, while the preliminaries of the magic rite are being arranged. First a fellow-handmaid colours the soles of Malika's feet with lac, and skilfully draws upon them with the brush a lotus-flower in full bloom. Then she puts on her ankles a pair of *nouparas*, ornaments which are symbolic of Kâma, the god of love. Malika, taking a branch of the asoka-tree in one hand and making ear-pendants of the buds, touches the tree with her left foot.[1] The King, who is in raptures at the sight, then comes forward ; but the sudden appearance of the second Queen on the scene creates an amusing but, for the King, a very disconcerting diversion, which ends this act of the play.

On the eastern gate of the Sânchî tope there is a very fine sculpture of a young woman clinging to the branches of an asoka-tree with both arms, and with the sole of her left foot pressing against

[1] Woman is said to have been born of the left side of Brahmâ, the Creator, and that seems to be the reason why the left side of her body is considered to be purer than her right side.

the trunk. Her legs are almost completely covered with ornaments.[1] A similar subject from Gandhara is illustrated by Dr. Vogel in a recent article published in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.*[2] Plate XII. gives a more modern example from an Orissan temple.

In later South Indian sculpture a very similar *motif* is common, called by modern temple craftsmen, "the girl with the creeper falling over her." (Plate XIII.). A young woman, probably meant for an *apsará*, resting on the left leg and with the right leg crossed in front of it, stands on the back of a *makara*, the fish-emblem of the god of love. The *makara* holds in its mouth the stem of a conventionalised creeper which winds in richly elaborated scrolls over the head of the figure. With one hand raised up she grasps the lower tendrils of the creeper ; the other hand rests easily upon her hip—the attitude of Malika when she ravished the heart of King Agnimitra under the asoka-tree.

It is not my intention to attempt to follow the symbology of Hinduism in all its intricate details. For understanding Indian art it is not necessary to acquire the erudition of the savant ; those who are absorbed in counting trees often miss the beauty of the wood. It is much more important to recognise principles which apply not more particularly to Indian art than to art-criticism in general.

In the explanations I have given here and

[1] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XXIX.

[2] Juillet–Septembre, 1909.

elsewhere I have endeavoured to attach to Indian artistic symbols the meanings which the great Indian artists who used them intended them to convey, not that which, now or formerly, has been given to them by superstitious priests and ignorant peasants. No art can be interpreted correctly unless it is clearly understood that there is a process of evolution in the meaning of symbols, as in religious ideas. Much of the misunderstanding and depreciation of Indian culture in Europe has been due to the want of recognition of this principle.

It may be partly true, as Sir George Birdwood is always insisting, that "India has remained, to the present day, a reservation of antiquity—Chaldæan, Assyrian, and Babylonian." If local traditions and superstitions are considered, the same might be said of many parts of Christian Europe; but one does not look to European folklore or the thoughts of the ignorant peasant to interpret the higher spiritual significance of Christianity. In the same way it is utterly misleading to interpret the great works of Indian sculpture and painting in an academic or pedantic sense totally at variance with the philosophy which inspired Indian culture in all its higher aspects, and to ascribe to symbolic forms used by Indian artists and philosophers in the fifth century A.D. meanings which may or may not have been applied to them, in other remote countries, 500 or 5,000 years before Christ.

We must attach to Christian symbols the meaning given them by Christian artists and the early Christian Fathers, not that which Hindu archæologists might be inclined to ascribe to them. Similarly, if we would understand Indian art, or any aspect of Indian culture, we must give to Siva, Ganesha, and other Indian symbols the meaning which Indian artists and authoritative Indian teachers originally gave to them, and not confuse them with the superstitions of the uncultured, or read into them their prehistoric derivations.

It is quite certain, as Count D'Alviella has so admirably explained in his book on the Migration of Symbols, that each religion preserves in its rites and symbols survivals of the whole series of former religions; but, as he wisely observes, "it is not the vessel that is important, but the wine which we pour into it; not the form, but the ideas which animate and transcend the form."

It is by concentrating themselves upon the forms, rather than upon the ideas which animate them, that many archæologists have gone so much astray in their interpretations of Indian art. Though Indian artists borrowed the traditional forms of Egypt, Chaldæa, Assyria, Babylonia, and Greece, it was not the ideas originally associated with those forms which gave them inspiration, but the philosophy of the Upanishads and the teachings of their spiritual leaders.

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE PATHS

In the psychology of Indian art the underlying religious ideals, which make it so closely akin to the Christian art of the Middle Ages, are contained in the doctrine of the Three Paths, the three ways leading to salvation, known as the way of works (*karma-marga*), the way of faith (*bhakti-marga*), and the way of knowledge (*gnana-marga*); which may be explained as the concept of the Trimûrti applied to human life and conduct.

It is hardly within the province of an artist to enter upon the archæological question as to when those ideas were first named and shaped by priests and schoolmen into definite religious concepts, or to join in the keen controversy as to how much modern Hinduism is indebted to Christian teaching. But I think it must be evident to every one with artistic insight who reads Indian art, not in Sanskrit and Pali texts, but in the great monuments which Indian artists bequeathed to posterity, that, just as the spiritual impulses which created Indian art originated in times long anterior to the

sculptures of Bharhut, Sânchî, and Gandhara, so the religious ideals which underlie the doctrine of the Three Paths are of much greater antiquity than the Vaishnavaite sect of Hinduism, which now claims one of them for itself.

These ideals have been the common property of all Indian art, from the time of Asoka down to the present day. *Moksha*, spiritual freedom, has always been the goal of Indian desire, hymned with as much passionate fervour by the Buddhist *bhikku* and *bhikkuni* as by Hindu religious devotees, and striven for as keenly by the unlearned pilgrim and *sâdhu* as by the Brahmin *sannyâsi*. Islam gave the goal another name, and put forward another spiritual guide, but the goal remained the same.

The three paths to salvation distinguished three different religious temperaments, and three classifications of intellectuality, of occupation, and of social rank. The path of highest attainment, that of knowledge, was that marked out especially for the Brahmin priest or the intellectual Kshatriya: it was the shortest and most direct way to Nirvana. The path of works, or service, was for the busy man of the world, for the statesman, the artist, the merchant, the artisan, and the common labourer. The path of faith had a more general application, for it was a way which was open to all classes; all whose hearts were filled with the love of God and gave their lives to Him could find salvation

[1] *Bhakti-marga.*

in *bhakti*, though worldly pursuits might clog their feet and make the way longer and more difficult.

Bhakti comprehends all the three cardinal virtues—faith, hope, and charity. Dr. Grierson, summarising the aphorisms of Sândilya, says that "it is not knowledge, though it may be the result of knowledge. It is not worship, etc. These are merely outward acts, and *bhakti* need not necessarily be present in them. It is simply and solely an affection devoted to a person, and not belief in a system. There is a promise of immortality to him who 'abides' in Him. A wish is selfish; affection is unselfish. It is not a 'work,' and does not depend upon an effort of the will. The fruit of 'works' is transient; that of *bhakti* is eternal life. Works, if they are pure, are a means to *bhakti*. To be pure, they must be surrendered to Him; *i.e.* the doer must say, 'Whatever I do, with or without my will, being all surrendered to Thee, I do it as impelled by Thee. Good actions, done for the good results which they produce in a future life, do not produce *bhakti*, but are a bondage."

Joined with this religious fervour was the intense feeling of reverence and love of nature, that which shines out first in the Vedic hymns, which illumines the great epics and all the best Indian literature. The places in which the gods loved to dwell, and auspicious for their temples, were the wooded hill-tops, the green, sequestered forest glades, and the cool mountain-ridges overlooking

an endless stretch of dust-laden plain, where the weary soul could rest and sing:

> Oh, free indeed! Oh, gloriously free am I![1]

Or, as a Hindu astrologer writes:

"On sandy banks scratched by the nails of aquatic birds, and as charming to the eye and heart as the swelling hips of sportful damsels. Or near a lake azure as the clear sky, where dark lotuses are open, like so many eyes, where skipping swans form, as it were, a white umbrella, and ducks, ospreys, and cranes raise their cries. . . . Or on the seaside crowded with happily arrived splendid ships, and showing a line half dark, half white, owing to the fishes and white birds lurking in the rotang."

Or, again:

"Places where rivers flow, having curlews for their tinkling zone, singing swans for their melodious voice, the water-sheet for their cover, and carps for their belt; regions where streams have blooming trees on the margin . . . tracts of land in the neighbourhood of woods, rivers, rocks, and cataracts; towns with pleasure-gardens—it is in such places that the gods at all times take delight."[2]

This appreciation of nature's charm is, indeed, the feeling which inspires all art. But there is a distinction which makes the Indian outlook

[1] "Psalms of the Sisters," No. XI. Translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids.

[2] "Brihat-sanghita of Varâha-mihira." Translated by Dr. Kern. *J.R.A.S.*, vol. vi. part i. pp. 72 *et seq.*, and part ii. p. 317.

fundamentally different to that of the West. In Western thought man is supreme, and its whole ideal of beauty is centred in the human form. It is for man's delight that nature is so gaily dressed ; for him the sun and moon do shine, and the trees bring forth their flowers and fruit. For *his* salvation God reveals Himself. The dumb animals are his companions and friends only when they minister to his needs, sustenance and comfort; they have no place in his heaven.

There is no parallel in Western hagiology to the touching incident in the Mahâbhârata when Yudhishthira, the sole survivor of the heroic Pândava brothers, having at last reached the Gates of Swarga, is met by Indra himself, but refuses to enter the shining car which will transport him to Paradise unless his faithful dog is allowed to accompany him : "O mighty Indra! I will not forsake this dog of mine, even for my own salvation."

Only in rare moments of illumination has Christian Europe realised, with St. Francis, that all creation is one. It has been left to modern science to confirm what Indian philosophy taught three thousand years ago, and what Indian art has ever sought to express.

Since the days of remote antiquity when the *rishis* addressed their prayers to the Unknown God:

"He who gives breath, He who gives strength, whose command all the bright angels revere, whose

shadow is immortality, whose shadow is death. . . . He who, through His might, became the sole King of the breathing and twinkling world; who governs all this, man and beast"[1]—

this has been India's message to the world ; and this is the faith of every Indian peasant to-day.

When Râma started off to his exile in the forest, all nature joined in the entreaties of the sorrowing citizens of Ayodhya :

> Thick darkness o'er the sun was spread ;
> The cows their thirsty calves denied,
> And elephants flung their food aside.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Each lowly bush, each towering tree
> Would follow too for love of thee.
> Bound by its roots it must remain,
> But—all it can—its boughs complain,
> As, when the wild wind rushes by,
> It tells its love in groan and sigh.
> No more through air the gay birds flit,
> But, foodless, melancholy, sit
> Together on a branch and call
> To thee, whose kind heart feels for all.[2]

Sîtâ's first care, when the edge of the forest was reached, was to invoke the spirit of the lordly pîpal-tree :

> "Hail, hail, O mighty tree ! Allow
> My husband to complete his vow ;
> Let us, returning, I entreat,
> Kauslayá and Sumitrá meet."
> Then, with her hands together placed,
> Around the tree she duly paced.

[1] Rig-Veda, 121. Translated by Max Müller : "Sacred Books of the East," vol. xxxii. p. 1.

[2] The "Râmâyana," canto xlv. Griffith's translation.

It is not the ignorance and superstition of the primitive savage, but a firmly rooted belief in the doctrine of reincarnation and in the immanence of God, which makes the Indian express so reverently and worshipfully his intimate fellowship with all created things; addressing his prayers, not to stocks and stones, but to the all-prevailing Spirit which dwells therein. Gautama himself had passed through all forms of life in his progress to Nirvana, and in the tree, worm, or insect, or in the beast of the field, there still might dwell the soul of the Buddha that is to come.

The Indian poet makes Prince Siddhartha, when finally he set out on his mission to redeem mankind, caress his good horse Kamthaka and exhort him, "like a friend, to his duty," to strive for his own good and the good of the world; and on parting from him, when the "noblest of steeds" licked Siddhartha's feet and dropped hot tears, these were the Prince's consoling words: "Shed not tears, Kamthaka. This thy perfect equine nature has been proved—bear with it; this thy labour will soon have its fruit."[1]

And so the Indian artist is always convinced that the *bhakti* which inspires his own work is shared by all creation. In the sculptures of Sânchî and Amarâvatî he shows the wild elephants coming to pour libations over the sacred tree under which

[1] "The Buddha-karita of Ashvagosha," book vi. 58. Translated by E. B. Cowell.

the Buddha sat, and all the denizens of the forest join with their human fellow-creatures in adoration of the Buddha's footprints, his begging-bowl, or his relic-shrines. It is to symbolise this universal fellowship of man, the unity of all creation, that the Indian artist loves to crowd into his picture all forms of teeming life, while the Western is always insisting on plain spaces for emphasising the supremacy of man, for isolating and for preserving artistic unity. From this motive the Indian sculptor adds enrichment upon enrichment to his decorative scheme, the architect breaks up his ground-plan, divides the spires of the temples into many facets, piles pinnacle upon pinnacle, and uses every constructive feature to symbolise the universal law of the One in many.

The European critic and art-teacher, not understanding the Indian motive, and generally standing quite aloof from the Indian environment, lectures the Indian in a tone of intellectual superiority upon lack of classical simplicity and neglect of artistic "principles." The Indian, striving to learn the wisdom of the West, flounders helplessly in an intellectual element totally foreign to his spiritual instinct, and his brain merely records automatically the prescriptions of his pedantic teachers. But it is altogether unjust to attribute incoherency and want of co-ordination to Indian art in general. Nothing is more admirable in the great monuments of India than the consummate skill and imagination with which, in spite of the

extraordinary wealth of detail, every part of the whole is perfectly adjusted to its place and so balanced that æsthetic unity is always perfectly preserved.

It is only when *bhakti* is lost and the whole spiritual basis of Indian art is superseded by the modern commercial instinct, when the Indian barters his birthright for a mess of pottage and manufactures by the yard for the markets of Europe, that it becomes incoherent and meretricious. And it is generally by this commercial trash that artistic Europe now judges India.

Indian art has never been surpassed in expressing, with perfect simplicity and directness, the pure devotion and self-surrender implied in *bhakti*—"Whatever I do, with or without my will, being all surrendered to Thee, I do it as impelled by Thee." It is the *motif* in the exquisite group of the mother and child before Buddha in the Ajanta cave-paintings, and in one of the most perfect of the Bôrôbudûr reliefs—that which shows the Buddha arriving on the shores of Java, having crossed the ocean on a lotus-flower to bring his message to the island. In the sky above the spirits of the air throng together joyfully, bringing their offerings and throwing flowers around him. On earth the prince and his wives prostrate themselves at his feet; and the deer from the forest calls to her little one to join in adoration of the Lord of the deer who had once offered his life for them.[1]

[1] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XXXV.

As a religious cult *bhakti* finds artistic expression in modern Hindu art in subjects relating to the love of Radha for Krishna, where Krishna is the Indian Orpheus, drawing all creation to listen to the divine music of his flute, and where Radha's passionate devotion is the symbol of the soul's yearning for God.

In Southern India the religious idealism of *bhakti* is represented by a series of fine quasi-portrait statuettes now in the Colombo Museum. Plate XIV. is a bronze figure of Apparswami, a native of Southern India, who lived about the sixth century A.D. He was first a Buddhist, but afterwards became an apostle of Jainism, and his hymns in praise of Siva are still sung in South Indian temples. To testify his devotion he went about weeding the courtyards of the temples, and he is here represented with hands joined in prayer and the weeding implement resting on his left shoulder. He was a contemporary and friend of another Saivaite saint, Tiru-gnana-sambandha Swami, who was said to have been called to the worship of Siva when a child, and went about singing his praises to the accompaniment of a pair of golden cymbals.[1] There are several statuettes of this swami in the Colombo collection.

Plate XV. is from a very beautiful bronze statuette of Sundara Mûrti Swami, also in the Colombo Museum, which is attributed to the tenth

[1] See *Spolia Ceylonica*, issued by the Colombo Museum, September 1909, p. 68.

PLATE XIV



APPARSWAMI

or eleventh century A.D. The charming story of the saint's illumination and consecration to the service of Siva is told by Dr. Coomaraswamy in his "Selected Examples of Indian Art."[1]

These saintly legends sufficiently explain the devotional spirit by which these statuettes are animated. The spirit of *bhakti*, the simple, child-like faith which finds full and complete satisfaction of all worldly desires in the worship and service of God, is perfectly expressed in the rapt face, the unstudied reverential attitude, and in the deliberate exclusion of all petty technical details which might divert attention from the all-absorbing *motif*. It is an art, with perfect control of technical methods, which from its intense sincerity and depth of religious conviction makes no parade of virtuosity; it aims straight for truth, and hits the mark with effortless ease. The personality of the artist is merged in his own creations.

This, indeed, is essentially a characteristic of all Indian religious art, which it shares with the Gothic art of Europe—that the artist seeks no reward of fame or riches. He has no biographers; his masterpieces are unsigned. He is content that his own identity shall be completely lost in his art, his name forgotten. The merit which he gains is only that which is reckoned in the great account hereafter.

Mr. Binyon, I think, wrongly infers, from the paucity of literary references to the lives and works

[1] Essex House Press, 1910.

of artists in India, that the æsthetic sense is lacking in the Indian character, that it has played an inferior part in the national life. One fact which he has overlooked is that practically the whole of that part of Indian literature, the Silpa Sastras, which is concerned with the principles and practice of art, has hitherto been completely ignored by European scholars. No one has even thought it worth while to compile a catalogue, much less to devote time to the study of it. So far as art is concerned, Indian literature is a totally unexplored field. But, even allowing that in Chinese literature æsthetic subjects are given a more important place, that by no means proves that the artistic perceptions of the Chinese races have been more developed than those of Indians. No one will say that Europeans of the present day have profounder artistic convictions, finer æsthetic sensibility, or higher accomplishments than their forefathers; yet at no period in history has European literature concerned itself so much with art as at the present time.

Art must always speak for itself; we must judge Indian art by its own achievements. In spite of centuries of vandalism and neglect, there remains enough of it to show that Indian genius has never lacked the power to express its highest religious ideals in worthy æsthetic form. True, it may be that the idea of art for art's sake did not take root in the Indian mind except in the luxurious Courts of the Mogul Emperors. That

PLATE XV



SUNDARA-MÛRTI SWAMI

is simply an indication of the Hindu view of life as a whole, of the spirit of self-surrender always insisted upon by Indian philosophers and religious teachers—to work without attachment to the fruits of work; to realise self by resting on the One Supreme Self. This is very far from being a doctrine of æsthetic nihilism; no one who penetrates beneath the surface of Indian thought and life could take it in that sense.

Bhakti is the moving spirit in all great religious art, in the West as in the East. It is *bhakti* which lifts the art of Fra Angelico, or of Bellini, into a higher spiritual plane than that of Titian or Corregio. It is *bhakti* that we miss in nearly all the great masters of the Renaissance. Vanity, intellect, and wealth could raise another monument greater than St. Peter's at Rome; only *bhakti* could revive the glories of Bourges, Chartres, or the other great Gothic cathedrals of medieval Europe. Forced labour, money, and artistic genius might create another Dîwân-i-khâs at Delhi—another Elysium on earth for sensual desires—and perhaps another Taj Mahal. But without *bhakti* India, whether she be Hindu, Muhammadan, or Christian, can never again build shrines like those of Sânchî, Ajanta, Elephanta, or Ellora: and when *bhakti* is dead India, from being the home of the world's religions, will become the storm-centre of the East.

It is *bhakti* which now keeps Indian art alive: it is the lack of it which makes modern Western art so lifeless. The same spirit which

in the days of Asoka and Kanishka brought thousands of willing craftsmen to devote their lives to the service of the Blessed One in building and adorning the *stûpas* of Bharhut, Sânchî, and Amarâvatî, that same devotion which impelled the worshippers of Siva or of Vishnu, century after century, to the stupendous task of hewing out of the living rock the temples of Ellora and Elephanta, and the followers of Mahavira to carve with infinite labour, fantasy, and skill the marvellous arabesques and tracery of their temples in Western India—this *bhakti* is still a potent force in India, and if Great Britain could produce a statesman of Akbar's artistic understanding it might still be used, as Akbar used it, to consolidate the foundations of our Indian Empire. But this great spiritual force we usually ignore and condemn as superstition and barbarism. We try to exterminate it by the contra-forces of European science, European materialism, and European Philistinism.

Anglo-Indians have always ascribed the artistic triumphs of the Indian Mogul dynasty to the superior æsthetic genius of Islam; but this is a quite untrue reading of Indian art-history. They should rather be attributed to the wonderful statecraft of the free-thinker Akbar in rallying round his throne all the hereditary artistic skill of Hindustan, and in building up his empire with the *bhakti* of Hinduism in much the same way as the Mikados of Japan used the national cult of Shintoism to strengthen their own dynasty. The Moguls in

China, in Persia, in India, and wherever else they went, assimilated the art of the races they conquered. The art of Fatehpur-Sikri and of Jahangir's great palace at Agra is essentially Hindu art. Abul Fazl, writing with full appreciation of contemporary painting, says of the Hindus: "Their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them."[1] Even in the Taj Mahal, the typical masterpiece of what we call Mogul art, many of the principal craftsmen were Hindus, or of Hindu descent; and how much Persian art owed to the frequent importation of Indian artists and craftsmen is never understood by European art-critics.

The splendid Muhammadan architecture of Bijapur derived much of its grandeur and beauty from the skilful adaptation of Hindu principles of construction and design. All the great monuments of Saracenic art in India surpass those of Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and Spain, in the exact measure by which they were indebted to Hindu craftsmanship and inspired by Hindu idealism. The mosques of Cairo and Constantinople seem almost insignifi-

[1] "Ain-i-Akbari," Blochmann's translation, vol. i. p. 107. Abul Fazl's appreciation will be understood by any art-critic who has an opportunity of studying side by side a representative collection of Persian and Indian miniature paintings of the Mogul period. Those of direct Persian origin, in spite of the exquisite grace and fine technical qualities which they often have, lack the penetrative insight of the Hindu artist's work. The former might be compared with the French schools of the eighteenth century, in their daintiness and *chic*; the latter have more of the sentiment of the early Flemish schools, or of Carpaccio, with something of the profound insight of Rembrandt.

cant in design and feeble in construction compared with those of Bijapur, Delhi, Fatehpur-Sikri, and Ahmedabad. The painted stucco and the geometric ingenuity of the Alhambra are cold and monotonous beside the consummate craft and imagination of the Mogul palaces in India.

And what is it in the Taj Mahal—that indefinable something always felt rather than understood by those who have tried to describe it—but the subtle inspiration of Hindu genius which animates the lifeless stones and makes one feel that it is not a cold monument of marble, but Shah Jahan's beloved, Mumtaz Mahal herself, who lingers still in all her youthful beauty upon the banks of the shining Jumna? The inspiration of the Taj came not from its Muslim builders: it was the spirit of India which came upon it and breathed into it the breath of life.

Saracenic art flourished in India just so long as the Mogul emperors were wise enough to observe perfect impartiality between Musalman and Hindu. When the bigot Aurangzîb expelled all the Hindu artists and craftsmen whom his father and grandfather had attracted to the service of the state, the art of the Moguls in India was struck with a blight from which it never recovered. Even in the present day all that is most fine and precious in living Indian art is found in the art inspired by this same *bhakti* produced by the descendants of the hereditary Hindu temple architects and craftsmen whom Akbar the Great enlisted in his service

to carry out all his public works, the imperial palaces, and mosques, as well as durbar halls, offices, stables, and irrigation works. The quality of their craftsmanship is generally in no way inferior to the work of the Mogul time; what they lack are the opportunities given them by the Moguls which we have hitherto refused to them.

Indian art can only be preserved by the survival, or revival, of the spiritual power which created it. The spread of Western political institutions and Western religious formularies in India should not mean the sterilisation of the spirituality of which Indian art is the expression.

It is true that every age has its own special needs and its own ideals. India may not need another Taj Mahal, or more glorious shrines than those she now possesses. But for the *bhakti* which created these all the world has need; and to give India's spirituality a new impetus and a wider range of activity would be the crowning achievement of British administration.

The art which we now try to propagate in India gives no spiritual impulse, and affords only the poorest mental pabulum: with its mechanical perspective, not related, like oriental perspective, and that which served the artists of Europe before the days of the Renaissance, to the laws of design, but, only empirically, to the science of optics; with its anatomy, likewise unrelated to artistic thought; and its "principles," which even we ourselves fail to put into practice.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN ART

THE historical background of Indian art is that which is furnished by the record of India's great spiritual teachers, by the exploits of her heroes, and by the lives of her noble men and women. It may seem often to the Western critic that all Indian literature is wanting in the historic sense, just as Indian sculpture and painting are assumed to be crude and inartistic for neglect of common physiological and other scientific facts. But just as Indian art is thoroughly scientific in the Indian sense, so Indian history also fulfils adequately the purpose which Indian historians had in view.

In the great period of Hindu and Buddhist sculpture fundamental physiological truths are never disregarded, though minor anatomical details are rigorously suppressed in order to achieve the end for which the artist was striving. Though artistic facts are not always sought for within the limits of the human or animal world, yet the laws of the structure of man or beast are never ignorantly outraged. Indian artistic anatomy is a pos-

sible and consistent ideal anatomy, and Indian perspective is a possible and consistent ideal perspective. The offence, to the modern European mind, is that the science of Hindu and Buddhist art transcends the limits of modern Western science which would keep art, like itself, chained to the observation of natural effects and phenomena, as they are impressed upon the retina of the ordinary human eye.

In the same way Indian history is not all a chaos of wild and fantastic legend, without system and without sequence, though such facts as the day on which Buddha died, or the exact date of the battle of Kurukshetra, were never considered of sufficient importance to be drummed into the heads of Indian schoolboys. Indian history, like Indian philosophy and Indian art, is a part of Indian religion. The scientific basis is there: the chronological sequence is not disregarded; but just as all Indian art aims at showing the relation between the seen and the unseen, between the material universe and the spiritual, so Indian history is much more concerned with the bearing which human events and actions have upon human conduct than with compiling a bare record of the events and actions themselves. Indian history is a spiritual guide and moral text-book for Indian people, not a scientific chronicle of passing events. Every day, in one of the innumerable worlds, a Buddha may die; so the day of Gautama's decease matters little to us: the way he lived and the

essence of his teaching are the things which are counted in the roll of the world's evolution.

Then again, Indian history, like Indian art, is ideal. The modern Western scholar is shocked at the confusion between poetry, romance, and history which is found in ancient records, both in the East and in the West—even in the Christian Bible. He assumes that the sole aim of the historian is to reveal the bare threads of the warp and weft in the loom of time, by picking out the fair flowers of the imagination, with which poetry and religion have lovingly embroidered it. But to the oriental there is a truth in idealism intrinsically more true than what we call the bare, the naked truth. Western science can never reveal the springs of human action, nor discover the spiritual bearing of human events, however minutely it may dissect and explain the organisation of matter. The "higher criticism" can never destroy the essential truths of the New Testament, nor can the searchlight of modern science diminish the truth of revelation which shines in the Buddhist and Hindu Scriptures. History is both art and science: the historian needs to be a seer and a poet to present facts in their true significance and to give to each event its relative spiritual importance. The embroidery of the great artist does not weaken the fabric which Time weaves for himself: it strengthens while it beautifies. And to those who believe in a spiritual world as even more actual and real than the phenomenal world

there is as much reality in the embroidery as in the plain warp and weft with which it is interwoven. Though the foolish or unskilful embroiderer may spoil the warp, yet it is only through the imagination that we can link together the seen and the unseen, and without imagination science itself loses its vital force, and the modern scientific historian may become the falsest of guides.

There is evidence enough to show that both Eastern and Western ways of thought may lead into a morass. Art in the East may degenerate into a mechanical repetition of debased hierarchical formularies; history, both sacred and profane, may sink into the most degraded obscurantism. And in the West, also, art may end itself in mere virtuosity, or in colour photography, machine-made sculpture, and the pianola: the historic sense may be sterilised through a foolish craze for autographs, buttons, and snuff-boxes. In the middle path, where safety lies, East and West, art and science, may go together hand in hand. Imagination must always lean upon reason: reason must ever seek a higher inspiration than its own. Siva is greater than Ganesha: yet Ganesha is always to be first invoked.

In Buddhist art the familiar story of the Great Renunciation and all the events of Gautama's life until the final attainment of Nirvana form the historical background for the expression of Indian ideals. As commentaries upon these events, the legends of his former lives, called the *jâta*

are added to explain symbolically the process of evolution by which the soul gradually obtains liberation from its material attachments: a process perceived by Indian seers several millennia before Western science announced that all matter is instinct with life.

Through such historical facts, and fictions containing eternal verities, the Indian sculptor and painter instructed the crowds of pious pilgrims who thronged the procession-paths enclosing the innumerable relic-shrines of Buddhism, and the aisles of thousands of *chaityas*, or churches, where the members of the Sangha met for worship. As aids to meditation also, the walls and ceilings of the great Buddhist *viharas*, the monastic universities, were covered with similar historical and mythological frescoes or sculptures.

Though in the preceding chapters I have followed archæological precedent in assuming that the representation of the divine ideal in Indian art, founded upon the ideal heroic type of Aryan poetry, is first discovered in Buddhist sculpture and painting, it is by no means certain that the Indian conception of the Buddha as a divinity was not adapted from earlier anthropomorphic images worshipped by other sects.

We have seen that it was not until a comparatively late period in Buddhism that the person of the Buddha as a divinity is represented in art; yet it is quite certain that anthropomorphic idols were worshipped in India long before the earliest

Gandhara sculpture. References to such images occur in several passages in the Mahâbhârata; *e.g.* in the Bhishma Parva[1] it is mentioned, as an omen of coming disaster, that "the idols of the Kuru king in their temples tremble and laugh, and dance and weep."

Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara of the Jains, a contemporary of the Buddha, is commonly assumed to be the founder of Jainism; but the Jains themselves claim for their religion a much greater antiquity, and it is possible that the earliest images of the Tirthankaras, or deified heroes, may have been the prototype followed by the Indian Buddhist image-makers.

But it was not in sculpture or in painting that the Jain creative genius asserted itself. They were magnificent builders, and, as examples of architectural design, the two towers of victory at Chittor, of the ninth and fifteenth centuries A.D., are unsurpassed of their kind in the whole world, while for consummate craftsmanship and decorative beauty the vaulted roofs of shrines like that of Mount Âbû, built by a merchant prince, Vimala Sah, in A.D. 1031, equal anything to be seen in Buddhist or Hindu buildings. Though it may not be quite true that, as Fergusson says, the Jains believed to a greater extent than other Indian sects in the efficacy of temple-building as a means of salvation, their wonderful "cities of temples" crowning the sacred hills of Pâlitânâ and Girnâr

[1] "Bhishma Vadha Parva," section cxiii. Roy's translation.

in Gujerat have a beauty of their own which is quite unique. The great majority of these temples are small, being the gifts of single wealthy persons, and, to quote the same authority, "they are deficient in that grandeur of proportion that marks the buildings undertaken by royal command or belonging to important organised communities." The charm of Pâlitânâ is due to its environment and the poetic feeling with which the site has been treated architecturally. The sculpture is comparatively unimportant.

The Jain figure-sculptors occasionally worked on a colossal scale in making the images of their saints, the Tirthankaras; probably the finest examples are the detached figures at Sravan Belgola, Kârkala, and Yannûr, in Mysore, which range in height from thirty-five to seventy feet. These are very noble as art, quite apart from their imposing dimensions. But, as a rule, Jain figure-sculpture seems to lack the feeling and imagination of the best Buddhist and Hindu art.

The reason for this must be attributed to the character of Jain religious tenets. The sect of the Jains, like that of the Saivaites, has always preserved more of the asceticism ingrained in orthodox Brahmanical teaching than did the Buddhists, or their spiritual successors, the Vaishnavaites.[1] The Jain ideal of quietism was to be attained by the

[1] In the fifteenth century A.D. several Jain religious teachers forbade the worship of images ("History and Literature of Jainism," by O. D. Barodia, p. 77).

austerities of the Hindu ascetic, and the Jain saints, having reached the heaven of their desires, troubled themselves no more with any worldly affairs.

Even down to the present day, though life is regarded as the most sacred principle in nature, the Jains hold it to be the highest virtue for a man or woman to retire to some lonely consecrated spot and obtain final release from worldly cares by a process of slow starvation. At Sravan Belgola, the hill to the north of that on which the great statue of Gomata stands is full of such associations, and many inscriptions on the rocks record the passing away of devout Jain kings and queens, and others less distinguished, who thus attained Nirvana.

In Jainism there are no divine incarnations of heroes, like Krishna, who labour for the material prosperity of humanity; neither did the Jain saints or deities develop into personifications of nature's manifold aspects. The Jain sculptors and painters were therefore limited to a very narrow range of ideas: they had no rich mythology or lives of the saints, full of wonders and of human interest, to illustrate; no grand conception of nature's moods—only the fixed, immutable pose of the ascetic absorbed in contemplation. Thus Jain art, as regards painting and sculpture, deserves more than that of any other Hindu sect the reproach of poverty of invention, which is often, without any justification, laid upon Indian art in general.

The Buddhist *stûpas* of Bharhut, Sânchî, and Amarâvatî, with the sculptured rails which enclose their procession-paths, belong to the Transition period of Indian art, dating from about the time of Asoka, or the third century B.C., down to the third or fourth century A.D. After that time the Buddhist dynasties of Northern India succumbed to their Hindu rivals, and Buddhism itself was gradually absorbed in the general current of Hindu thought, from out of which the two great modern sects, the Vaishnavaites and Saivaites, began to emerge.

In India Buddha eventually took his place in the Hindu theogony as one of *avatars* of Vishnu, and the heroes of the great epics, Krishna and Râma, came forward as the most prominent figures in national art and drama. But in the meantime the artistic traditions of Buddhism had found congenial soil in China, from whence they spread to Korea and Japan, and in Ceylon. The disasters to the Buddhist kingdoms in Northern India had also stimulated colonial enterprise, and in the great colony of Java Indian Buddhist art flourished magnificently until the conversion of the islanders to Islam.

The splendid seven-terraced shrine of Bôrôbudûr, which has escaped Muhammadan and Christian iconoclasm, contains the most perfect series of Buddhist historical sculptures now existing. Along the pilgrims' procession-paths on five different terraces are sculptured one hundred

and twenty panels illustrating events in the life of Gautama, and a similar number of scenes from the *jâtakas*.

The best sculptures of Bôrôbudûr, which belong probably to the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., reach to the highest point of Buddhist plastic art. Fergusson, in his history of Indian architecture, made the grievous mistake of assigning the zenith of Indian sculpture to the time of the later Amarâvatî reliefs, or about the third century A.D., and this cardinal error has not only led astray nearly all European writers in Indian art ever since,[1] but has formed the basis on which Indian art has been presented to the art-student by the national museums of Great Britain.

The travesty of Indian art-history which is thus put before the European public is as misleading as it would be for the museums of Tokio to exhibit Gothic art of the eleventh century as representing the zenith of medieval art in Europe, and for Japanese art-critics to write of European sculpture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as unworthy of serious consideration. Not only has Indian art-history been thus horribly distorted, but the whole official system of art-education in India has been based upon a similar misconception and perversion of Indian ideals.

[1] Mr. Vincent Smith in his article on Indian Archæology in the latest edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, says that after the third century A.D. there is little Indian sculpture which is worthy to be called art!

The art of India up to the fourth century A.D. was purely eclectic and transitional. The spirit of Indian thought was struggling to find definite artistic expression in sculpture and in painting, but the form of expression was not artistically perfected until about the seventh or eighth centuries, when most of the great sculpture and painting of India was produced. From the seventh or eighth to the fourteenth century was the great period of Indian art, corresponding to the highest development of Gothic art in Europe, and it is by the achievements of this epoch, rather than by those of Mogul Hindustan, that India's place in the art-history of the world will eventually be resolved.

With one important exception, the Ajanta cave-paintings,[1] practically the whole of the art of this period now existent belongs to sculpture or architectural design. This may be partly accounted for by the wholesale destruction of Indian paintings which took place under Muhammadan rule, especially in the time of Aurangzîb; it being much easier to obliterate paintings than to destroy sculpture. But the principal reason is probably that the spirit of *bhakti*, which animated

[1] Mrs. Herringham and M. de Goloubeff, with the assistance of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, are now engaged in making a complete artistic survey of the Ajanta paintings, for want of which I have not been able to make any detailed reference to them. It may therefore be hoped that before long the Western art-world may be enabled to appreciate fully these fragmentary but very precious remains of the great schools of Indian painting.

all the great art of the Buddhist-Hindu period, took more delight in sculpture than in painting on account of the greater labour and cost involved in it: from the idea that the greater the labour devoted to the service of the gods the greater would be the merit won by the devotee.

It should not be inferred from this that painting, as an art, never reached a high degree of perfection in India. The finest of the Ajanta paintings exhibit an amazing technical skill, a fertility of invention, and a power of expressing high religious ideals unsurpassed in any art. Although, after the time of the Buddhist supremacy, sculpture was generally preferred to painting in sacred buildings, it was the custom in every royal palace to have a *chitrasala*, or hall of painting, decorated with frescoes.[1] The art of the Mogul miniature paintings, some of which are as fine as the finest "fine art" of the West, was not entirely an importation into India from Persia, but largely a revival of the art of the Buddhist and Hindu court painters.

Nevertheless, the remains of Indian religious painting are now too fragmentary to place beside the enormous production of the great schools of China and Japan; and the Mogul court painters, like the fine art of modern Europe, represented a

[1] The custom continued until modern times, but, in the gradual extinction of all artistic culture among educated Indians, the traditional *chitrasala* has given place to collections of European pictures, generally of the most painful description.

distraction and amusement for cultured dilettanti rather than a great national art-tradition like that of the Far East. In the national art of Asia, China and Japan stand as supreme in their schools of painting as India does in her sculpture and architecture.

After the third or fourth century A.D., so erroneously considered as the culminating point of Indian sculpture, the Saivaites began to add a new and in some ways a unique chapter to the history of Indian art, with their great cave-temples and sculptures in stone and bronze. Like the Jains, the Saivaites were originally strict followers of the ascetic ideal: Siva being the personification of the meditative life, of that higher knowledge which is the most direct path for the soul's liberation. But, so long as the Buddhists maintained their identity as a separate sect of Hinduism their wonderful activity in artistic creation seems to have stimulated the Saivaites of Northern India to emulate the achievements of their rivals, and many of the finest Indian monuments of the pre-Muhammadan epoch—*e.g.* the temple of Elephanta and that of Kailâsa at Ellora—were dedicated to the worship of Siva.

It would, however, be quite fallacious to attempt a history of Indian art upon a rigid sectarian classification. The different currents of religious thought represented by the diverse sects of Hinduism intermingle at so many points that the only clear demarcations in Indian art-history are

PLATE XVI



THE KAILÂSA TEMPLE, ELLORA, FROM THE NORTH-WEST CORNER

dynastic, racial, and provincial or local. Thus the Buddhist Mahâyâna images of Nepal often symbolise the same ideas as the Saivaite sculptures of Elephanta and Ellora ; and it is often difficult to distinguish between Mahâyâna sculptures of the eighth and ninth centuries and those of the Saivaites.

Though Siva, like Vishnu, is reputed to have manifested himself in human incarnations, the incidents of the ascetic's life do not give much scope for the exercise of the artist's descriptive power, and most of the great groups of Saivaite sculpture illustrate myths of the Hindu cosmogony connected with Siva's powers either as the Creator or the Destroyer of the Universe, or popular stories of his relations with the Earth Mother, as represented by Umâ or Parvati. But after Sankarachârya, in the eighth century A.D., overcame the Buddhist philosophers in contests of dialectical skill, and thus established the spiritual ascendancy of the Saivaite cult, the Vedic objection to anthropomorphic religious symbolism seems to have revived in Northern India; and this, together with the influence of Muhammadan iconoclasm during Aurangzîb's long, intolerant reign, almost reduced Saivaite iconography in the north to the symbols of the *lingam* and the bull. The prohibition of image-worship on the part of Saivaite and Jain reformers at this period may have been dictated by motives of political expediency, in order to avert persecution of their faith by fanatical followers of Islam.

The splendid traditions of the Saivaite figure-sculptors were carried down to modern times by the bronze workers employed in the temples of Southern India and Ceylon. There are doubtless a great many fine Saivaite bronzes still buried underground. Many are hidden away in temples into which Europeans are not allowed to penetrate. Now that some educated Indians are beginning to take an intelligent interest in their national art we may expect that more of these treasures will be brought to light, and treated with greater artistic consideration than they are by the superstitious guardians of the temples. The degrading and vulgar modern practice of dressing up temple images with gaudy drapery, like children's dolls, reduces the status of the sculptor to that of a maker of lay figures, and accounts in some degree for the contempt with which all Indian sculpture has been regarded by Anglo-Indians.

Though Saivaism assimilated a great deal of the humanistic teaching of Gautama, the modern Vaishnavaites are more entitled to be considered the artistic heirs of Buddhism. Gautama himself, ignored by the Saivaites, is recognised as one of the incarnations of Vishnu. In the stories of Rama-Chandra and of Krishna, also incarnations of Vishnu, and of other heroes of the epics, Vaishnavaite art finds human types more closely related to the ethical ideal of Buddhism than to the ascetic ideal of the Saivaites.

But here again we must not draw such dis-

tinctions too closely : for the Râmâyana and the Mahâbhârata are as much the common property of all Hinduism as the English Bible and Shakespeare belong to all English-speaking people. The Indian epics contain a portrait-gallery of ideal types of men and women which afford to every good Hindu the highest exemplars of moral conduct, and every Hindu artist an inexhaustible mine of subject-matter.[1]

It is somewhat surprising for the student of Indian art to find that though the adventures of Râma and Sîtâ and the exploits of the Pândava heroes have such a deep hold upon popular imagination, even in the present day, and though the whole text of the great epics is regarded as holy writ, it is rarely that the subjects of important sculptures seem to have been taken directly from them in the great creative period of Indian art. The finest series of reliefs illustrating the Râmâyana are not in India but in the courtyard of a Vaishnavaite temple at Prambanam, in Java : they are ascribed to about the eleventh century A.D. An incident in the Mahâbhârata is illustrated in one of the series of sculptures at Mâmallapuram,

[1] Nothing is more significant of the general aloofness of the Anglo-Saxon from the inner consciousness of the Indian people than the fact that, while most educated Indians are perfectly familiar with the Bible and with Shakespeare, the Mahâbhârata has not as yet found any definite place in English literature. In spite of the heroic but inadequate attempt of Protap Chandra Roy to render it into English, it still, for the most part, remains more inaccessible to the average Englishman than the hieroglyphics of Egypt.

near Madras; and the temple of Angkor Vat, in Kambodia, has reliefs on a grand scale dealing with other events of the great war; but, with these exceptions, there is now hardly any important Indian sculpture illustrating the epics. Puranic literature supplies the subjects of practically all Hindu religious sculpture.

I think that the explanation of this is that the temples were held to be dwelling-places of the *devas*, and consequently the figures of human beings could only be appropriately represented on the exterior. Thus the principal sculptures within the sacred precincts related exclusively to the divinities who were worshipped therein, and generally to events which took place in the paradise of the gods.

From various references in Hindu dramatic writings we may conclude that the history of Râma and Sîtâ and of the Pândava heroes from whom many of the Hindu kings claimed descent were frequently illustrated in the fresco paintings of the royal *chitra-sâlas*, or picture-halls, which have now entirely disappeared. The epic of Indian womanhood and the Iliad of Asia seem now to be out of place in the up-to-date Indian prince's picture-gallery imported wholesale from Europe, and the Indian aristocracy is mostly concerned in obliterating all the remaining vestiges of Indian artistic culture.

The more modern Vaishnavaite literature and art are centred in the *bhakti* cult and in the

events of Krishna's early life at Brindâban, before he became the spiritual guide and champion of the Pândavas in the great war. In some of the popular art which relates to this aspect of Vaishnavism the spiritual significance of Krishna's relations with Radha and the *gopîs* is given a grossly material interpretation. But it would be wrong to infer that the obscenities which occasionally disfigure Hindu temples are necessarily indicative of moral depravity. In the matter of sexual relationship Indian civilisation, in every stratum of society, holds up a standard of morality as high as Europe has ever done.

The splendid sun-temples of Mudherâ in Gujerat (Plate XVII.) and of Kanârak in Orissa belong to a subsection of the Vaishnava cult, still represented by the Sauras, or those who worship Vishnu in his manifestation as Sûrya-Nârâyana. The former dates from about the eleventh century, and is, even in its present ruined condition, one of the noblest monuments of Indian architecture; the latter belongs to the thirteenth century, and is distinguished by its fine sculpture, especially the two grand warhorses,[1] and the elephants, Plate XXIII., which stand in front of it.

The sectarian classification of Buddhist-Hindu art, though it is useful as indicating roughly the variety of subject-matter in sculpture and painting, and to some extent the difference of architectural forms, does not imply any divergence in artistic

[1] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XLIII.

ideals. In this respect Jain, Buddhist, Saivaite and Vaishnavaite merely represent different aspects of one idea, different streams of thought flowing in one direction in the same watershed. In the same locality and of the same date Jain or Buddhist, Saivaite or Vaishnavaite can only be distinguished from each other by the choice of symbols, and then often with difficulty.

The political supremacy of the Moguls, established by Babar in 1526, brought about a large readjustment of artistic conditions but no fundamental change in artistic ideals. The royal palace, rather than the temple or monastery, became more exclusively the centre of creative art; for the puritan sentiment of Islam, even under the freethinker Akbar, would not concede to the highest expression of art any but material aims and a strictly secular scope. This Philistine influence reacted on the religious art of Hinduism, and no doubt stimulated, if it did not originate, the propaganda against the ritualistic use of images started by Jain and Saivaite religious teachers. From the sixteenth century the creative impulse in Hindu art began to diminish, though its technical traditions have maintained their vitality down to modern times.

In the Muhammadan Courts there was no place for the sculptor, except as a decorative craftsman; but in architecture Hindu idealism received a fresh impulse through dealing with new constructive problems, and Islam added to

PLATE XVII



TEMPLE OF SÛRYA, MUDHERÂ, GUJERAT

its prestige by the magnificence of the mosques built with the aid of Jain and Hindu temple craftsmen. Indian Saracenic architecture testifies not so much to the creative genius of the Moguls as to their capacity for assimilating the artistic culture of alien subject races. Christianity might have advanced much more rapidly in India if its leaders had not, with the puritanical intolerance of Aurangzîb, refused to allow the genius of Indian art to glorify the Christian Church, and tried to propagate the beauty of an Eastern faith with the whitewashed ugliness of Western formality.

In the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan the court painters fulfilled the same rôle as they had done under the former Buddhist and Hindu rulers; but the Mogul Emperors laid no claim to a divine ancestry, and priestly influence was no longer supreme in the state. The dominant themes in the art of the period were therefore not religious, but the romance of love and of war, the legends of Musalman and Rajput chivalry, the pageantry of state ceremonial, and portraiture.

Owing to the presence of Persian artists at the Mogul Court, European critics have generally classified all the painting of the time under the name of Indo-Persian, assuming, as so many have done with regard to early Indian Buddhist sculpture, that the creative impulse in Indian art came always from without instead of from within.

These are illogical and inartistic assumptions. The Persian painters at Akbar's Court were neither technically nor artistically superior to the Hindus. The creative stimulus came partly from the invigorating atmosphere of Akbar's Court, and from his own magnetic personality. Hindu art had been cramped by the rigid ritualistic prescriptions imposed by the Brahmin priests, who were not artists, like many of the Buddhist monks, but a purely literary caste. The illiterate but broad-minded Akbar gave both Musalman and Hindu artists their intellectual and spiritual freedom. In adapting itself to the new social order Indian art enlarged its boundaries and renewed its former vitality, assimilating the foreign technical traditions, but always maintaining its own ideals. Regarded as a whole, the Indian school of painting of the Mogul epoch is as distinct and original in artistic expression as any of the schools of Persia, China, or Japan.

With the accession of Aurangzîb the fierce iconoclasm of the first Muhammadan invaders of Hindustan was renewed, and the fine arts, including music, were placed under a fanatical priestly interdict, more detrimental to Indian art than all the asceticism of Hinduism. In modern times the influence of Western "education," with its purely commercial ideals, has been even more depressing to Indian art than the iconoclasm of Aurangzîb. Educated India under British rule, while affecting to exchange its own culture for that of the West,

has remained entirely aloof from those vital movements in British art and craft which in the last half-century have derived so much impetus from the study and exploitation of oriental art. Anglo-Indian departmentalism, always slow to move in art matters, still takes refuge in British Early Victorian formularies, and the theory that India has never shown any original genius for sculpture or painting continues to produce hopeless confusion in the whole conduct of art-education. Under present circumstances it would be far better if India were allowed to work out her own artistic salvation, without interference from the State. Western methods of education have opened a rift between the artistic castes and the "educated" such as never existed in any previous time in Indian history. The remedy lies, not in making Indian artists more literate in the European sense, not in teaching them anatomy, perspective, and model-drawing, nor in manufacturing regulation pattern-books according to Anglo-Indian taste, but in making the *literati*, educators and educated, conscious of the deficiencies of their own education which render them unable to appreciate the artistic wealth lying at their doors.

For behind all this intellectual and administrative chaos there remains in India a native living tradition of art, deep-rooted in the ancient culture of Hinduism, richer and more full of strength than all the eclectic learning of the modern academies and art-guilds of Europe; only waiting for the

spiritual and intellectual quickening which will renew its old creative instinct. The new impulse will come, as Emerson has said, not at the call of a legislature: it will come, as always, unannounced, and spring up between the feet of brave and earnest men.

Even now the signs of the coming renaissance are not wanting. It is impossible to believe that India will wholly succumb, body and soul, to the materialism of modern Europe; and, seeing how much both Asia and Europe owe to Indian culture, it would be foolish for politicians to regard the reassertion of Indian idealism with suspicion and distrust. It is indeed a happy augury for the spiritual and intellectual progress of humanity, and for the ultimate disappearance of those differences and prejudices which make the gulf between East and West.

PART II

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES XVIII TO XXXII

PLATES XVIII AND XIX

THE GREAT BAS-RELIEFS AT MÂMALLAPURAM, MADRAS, KNOWN AS "ARJUNA'S PENANCE"

THE great group of Hindu monuments at Mâmallapuram, consisting of monolithic temples, caves, and bas-reliefs, contains some of the finest examples of Indian sculpture now existing. They were executed under the auspices of some of the Pallava kings who had their capital at Conjeeveram (Kânchî), in the beginning of the fourth century, and gradually extended their power so that from about A.D. 625 to the middle of the eighth century they held sway over the greater part of Southern India. It is to the latter period that these sculptures belong. Many of them are said to have been executed in the reign of Mahendravarman I. (*circa* A.D. 600 to 625).[1]

The bas-reliefs, of which two illustrations are given, are carved on two huge granite boulders of about thirty feet in height and a combined length of about ninety feet.

According to popular tradition, the subject of the sculptures is that of Arjuna practising austerities in order to gain the arms of Indra, as recorded in the Vana Parva of the Mahâbhârata. Though it is uncertain whether this is correct, the story is a typical one for illustrating

[1] Vincent Smith's "Early History of India," p. 425.

Hindu belief in the virtue of ascetic practices for gaining extraordinary psychic powers, and it sufficiently explains the *motif* of the sculptures.

When the fateful struggle between the Pândavas and Kauravas was impending, Arjuna, on the advice of his brother Yudhisthira, set out towards Himavat to obtain the celestial weapons guarded by Indra. He was armed with Krishna's famous bow, Gandiva, with its inexhaustible quivers, and had learnt from Yudhisthira a mantra of tremendous power for controlling the forces of nature. By virtue of the spiritual power gained by ascetic practices, Arjuna sped with marvellous swiftness, and reached the sacred mountain in one day; but at the approach to Indra's paradise a celestial voice commanded him to stop.

Looking around him, he saw under a tree an emaciated ascetic with matted locks, who reproached him for disturbing his peaceful abode, and endeavoured with smooth words to persuade him to throw away his weapons. But the Pândava hero was not to be turned from his purpose, even when the ascetic threw off his disguise and revealed himself as Indra, making tempting offers if he would consent to remain and enjoy the happiness of the celestials.

"I desire not the regions of bliss," Arjuna answered, "nor the celestial peace and prosperity of the gods. Shall I desert my brothers in the forest, leaving their wrongs unavenged and the foe unvanquished, to be scorned for all ages by the whole world?"

Moved by Arjuna's constancy, Indra consented to yield to him the celestial arms when Siva, the highest of all the gods, should deign to reveal himself to him.

Indra then disappeared and Arjuna prepared to devote himself to the rigid austerities of Yoga in order to obtain the desired boon from Siva. He first entered a mysterious

PLATE XVIII



BAS-RELIEF AT MÂMALLAPURAM: RIGHT HALF

forest full of wild beasts and fearsome monsters. The celestial drums and conches thundered above him ; thick showers of flowers fell upon the earth, and Indra's clouds darkened the sky. Reaching an auspicious spot on the banks of a foaming river, "echoing with the notes of swans, peacocks, and cranes," he laid aside his armour and weapons and began the fasting and meditation which should attract the attention of the great god, Siva. The first month he subsisted by eating fruits at intervals of three nights; next he increased the interval of fasting to six nights; and next to fourteen days. By the fourth month he began to exist on air alone; standing on the tips of his toes with arms upraised. The tremendous energy produced by his mental concentration began to disturb the cosmic order, and all the great sages went in agitation to complain to Siva.

Mahâdeva reassured them by saying that Arjuna's desire was not prompted by any impiety, and forthwith assuming the disguise of a hunter, he took up his bow and arrow, and, followed by his consort Umâ and thousands of celestials in similar disguise, the great god descended the slopes of Himavat to test the courage of the hero. As they approached the whole forest was illumined with heavenly light, a solemn stillness pervaded the place, the songs of birds were hushed, and the rivers ceased to flow.

Then Siva, by the power of illusion, caused a demon in the form of a wild boar to pass in front of Arjuna, who fitted a shaft to his bow to slay it, undeterred by the commanding voice of the divine hunter claiming it as his own prize. The boar fell struck at the same instant by the fiery shafts of Arjuna, and by those of Siva. An angry dispute arose between the rival hunters, ending in a terrific combat, in which Arjuna was at last struck down

senseless. Soon regaining consciousness, he prostrated himself in worship at Siva's feet, who, revealing himself in his divine splendour, praised him for his valour, and promised to bestow upon him an irresistible weapon with which he should overcome all his foes.

Mahadeva, having instructed Arjuna in the use of the celestial arms, disappeared from his sight, like the setting sun in a clear sky. Arjuna, kneeling in adoration exclaimed, "Happy indeed am I, and greatly favoured for I have beheld and touched with my hand the three-eyed Hara, the wielder of the Pinâka, and obtained this boon! My enemies are already vanquished! My purpose is achieved!"

Then Varuna, the god of waters, with all his attendant deities; the river goddesses; the Nâgas, snake-gods; the Daityas and Sâdhyas; came to see the mighty hero who had fought with Mahadeva himself. There came also Kuvera, the lord of wealth, seated on a splendid car; Yama, the judge of the nether world, with mace in hand; and Indra, too, with his Queen, mounted on the celestial elephant, Airâvata, a white umbrella over his head, looking like the moon amid fleecy clouds. They also bestowed upon Arjuna various weapons of tremendous power; Yama, his mace; Varuna, his noose; Kuvera, the magic Antardhâna. Finally, taking Arjuna in his shining car, Indra bore him aloft to his heavenly city, Amarâvatî, where, with benedictions from all the *devas* he received from the hands of the Rain-god his thunderbolt and the lightnings of heaven.

At Indra's command he remained there for five years, learning from Chitrasena the divine arts of music, singing, and dancing—accomplishments which he found very useful in his subsequent adventures among his fellow-mortals.

PLATE XIX



THE GREAT BAS-RELIEF AT MÂMALLAPURAM : CENTRAL PART
(From a photograph by Messrs. Nicholas & Co , Madras)

The Mâmallapuram sculptures do not follow very closely the Mahâbhârata version of the story, but it should be remembered that there must have been many local variants of it. On the left-hand rock, the sculptures of which remain half finished, the emaciated figure, supposed to be Arjuna, is seen practising his austerities, standing on one leg with his arms raised over his head. The figure of a four-armed deity standing by him, armed with a huge mace and attended by dwarfs, seems to be that of Siva. Immediately below the supposed figure of Arjuna there is a small temple of Vishnu, at the base of which a number of devotees are grouped. The upper part of both rocks is covered with a great crowd of celestials, gods, and sages; the Gandharvas, the heavenly musicians with bird-like legs, and various four-footed denizens of the Hindu Olympus are hastening to watch the wonderful penance.

The right-hand rock is distinguished by the magnificent group of elephants, Indra's noble beasts, which are very realistically treated. The foremost tusker, which gives shelter to a delightful group of baby elephants, stands gravely watching Arjuna, while the female impatiently waits her turn behind him.

The cleft between the rocks is skilfully used to show a Nâga and Nâgini, and other snake-deities, as coming up from the depths of ocean, drawn by the ascetic's magnetic power, to pay him homage.

PLATE XX

A RELIEF FROM MÂMALLAPURAM—VISHNU SUPPORTING THE UNIVERSE

PLATE XX., a very characteristic example of the Hindu artist's treatment of Puranic allegory, is one of the most impressive and powerful of the Mâmallapuram group of sculptures.

Vishnu is here represented as the all-pervading Soul of the Universe, upholding the heavens (symbolised by the curved cornice of the Dravidian temple) with one arm, and filling space with all the attributes of his glory. Seated at his feet are four munis, or genii, the guardians of his paradise Vaikuntha, symbolising the four quarters of the earth.

Vishnu himself, in his material aspect, stands for the sun in its midday splendour, as representing the principle of all life. On the right and left are smaller figures of Brahmâ and Siva on their heavenly lotus-thrones as symbols of the sun's rising and setting. The "strides of Vishnu," or the apparent movement of the sun across the heavens, are suggested by the upraised leg and the outstretched finger of one hand which Siva is touching.

The figure with a boar's head on the right of Vishnu's head is the Varâha-avatara, or boar-incarna-

PLATE XX



VISHNU SUPPORTING THE UNIVERSE: BAS-RELIEF AT MÂMALLAPURAM

tion, in which form Vishnu raised the earth above the Flood.

The spiritual signification of the various attributes displayed by Vishnu are thus explained in the Puranas: The Kaustubha gem which he wears in his necklace is the pure Soul of the World, undefiled and void of qualities. The chief principle of things (Pradhana) is seated on the Eternal in the Sri-vatsa mark, a curl on the breast.

The principle of consciousness (Ahamkara)[1] in its twofold division, into organs of senses and rudimentary unconscious elements, is symbolised by the famous bow Gandiva, used by Arjuna in the Great War (here held by Vishnu in his bent left arm), and by the spiral conch shell, the sound of which reverberates throughout the whole universe.[2] The shafts shot from the bow (*i.e.* the sun's rays) represent the faculties of action and perception. The bright sword, wielded by the right arm, is holy wisdom, concealed at times in the scabbard of ignorance. On the right side, also, Vishnu wields his mace, which is the power of the intellect, and the discus, which is the mind, whose thoughts, like the weapon, fly swifter than the winds. (The allegorical significance of the remaining symbol, the shield held by the left arm, is not explained in the Vishnu Purana. It seems to be

[1] Ahamkara = the principle of individual existence, that which appropriates perceptions, and on which depends the notions, I think, I am. The three modifications of Ahamkara are (1) *Vaikârika*, (2) *Taijasa*, and (3) *Bhutadi*, corresponding to the three primordial *gunas*, or qualities—*sattvam*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The sattvik form of consciousness produces the senses, and the tamasik the five elemental rudiments—ether, wind or air, fire or light, water, and earth. The Taijasa form of consciousness is the energic principle, causing the other two, which are inert by themselves, to act. Hence Ahamkara is described as having a "twofold division."

[2] The vibration of the rudimentary elements is regarded as the material creative force. The same idea is represented by Siva's drum.

about to cover the descending figure whose movement symbolises the setting of the sun, and thus it may be taken to represent both the darkness of night and Mâyâ, the power of illusion, or the veil of phenomenal existence by which the Supreme Being conceals His real nature.) His necklace is composed of the five precious gems, pearl, ruby, emerald, sapphire, and diamond, which represent the five elemental rudiments (see note, p. 153).

Artists of every school will recognise the splendid vigour and imaginative power with which the unknown sculptor has carved this striking composition on the face of the living granite rock. The bold generalisation of execution is quite free from the over-elaboration from which later Indian sculpture sometimes suffers. The figure of the sun-god in his midday glory, the pillar of the heavens whose glowing light pervades all space, is a grand allegorical conception worthy of a Dante or Milton. The stately uprightness of the body of the Deity, echoed by the lines of the mighty bow and sword and by the slightly varied attitudes of the four genii grouped in massive relief at the base, contrast with telling effect against the vigorous movement of the outstretched arms, forming a radiant halo behind the figure: while the ascending and descending movement of the smaller figures on the right and left balances the whole composition in lower planes of relief, which finely symbolise the gradual dawn and close of day at the sun's rising and setting. The extended movement of the left leg may easily provoke Philistine ridicule; but the critic whose outlook is not too much narrowed by the æsthetic conventions of modern academic Europe must admit that the reverential feeling of the sculptor fully justifies the temerity which might so easily have proved disastrous to an artist of lesser power.

PLATE XXI

LAKSHMÎ, OR SRÎ, ARISING FROM THE SEA OF MILK—A RELIEF FROM MÂMALLAPURAM (CAVE XXV)

THE story of Lakshmî, or Srî, the consort, or *sakti*, of Vishnu—representing fertility and earthly prosperity—arising from the Cosmic Ocean when churned by the gods and *asuras*, is given in the text, pp. 60–3. The gracious goddess, radiant with beauty, rose from the waves, seated on a full-blown lotus-flower, attended by Ganga and other river-deities. Indra's elephants, the mighty monsoon clouds which refresh the parched plains, bring their precious waters in golden vessels, and pour them over her, the Queen of the Universe.

Like all the Mâmallapuram reliefs, the subject is treated with a freshness and directness which will appeal to European artists more than the elaborate, ritualistic formalism of some later Hindu sculpture. It is Indian art of the great Hindu epoch, strong, free, and full of creative vigour.

The old-world story lends itself to such a treatment. Like the subjects of Kalidâsa's masterpieces, *Sakuntala* and the *Meghaduta*, it strikes one of those primitive chords of human feeling on which all the great dramatists prefer to play. Lakshmî, Mother Nature, true woman and goddess most divine, is represented in the supreme

moment when, rising from the waves on her lotus-throne, she gazes with undisguised rapture and wonderment upon the apparition of Vishnu in all his splendour before her. There is a fine inspiration, a touch of the eternal feminine, in her simple, spontaneous gesture, full of adoration for her divine spouse as she prepares to throw herself upon his breast. The reverential mien of the attendant river-goddesses at her side is simply and charmingly expressed ; and the colossal heads of Indra's elephants, rendered with consummate craftsmanship, make an imposing canopy for the whole group.

PLATE XXI



LAKSHMI ARISING FROM THE SEA OF MILK, MÂMALLAPURAM

PLATES XXII AND XXIII

SCULPTURE OF A BULL IN KRISHNA'S MANDAPAM, MÂMALLAPURAM—TWO ELEPHANTS IN FRONT OF THE SÛRYA TEMPLE AT KANÂRAK

THE grand monumental bull carved in the shrine known as Krishna's Mandapam at Mâmallapuram is one of a group illustrating the story of Krishna's exploit in lifting up the mountain Govardhana to protect Nanda and his cattle from the torrents of rain poured down by the wrath of Indra. Like the elephants in the great bas-relief known as Arjuna's penance (Plate XVIII.) it is frankly realistic in treatment; yet not without the ideal feeling of classic art in its masterly generalisation of fact.

Nandi, a milk-white bull, is the name of Siva's vehicle, which is a symbol both of the deity's generative power and of *dharma*, righteousness, or the whole duty of the Hindu. The latter attribute is derived from the fact that the bull carried the wood for the sacrificial fire, and was one of the principal victims.

With this sculpture we may compare the two elephants in front of the famous sun-temple at Kanârak, in Orissa (Plate XXIII.), which belongs to the middle of the thirteenth century. They are companion sculptures to the magnificent horse and warrior which I have illus-

trated in a previous volume.[1] In such grand works as these, comparable with the finest sculptures of the West, we can find sufficient refutation of the baseless imputation so often brought against Hindu artists that they are no lovers of nature, and lack the power of truthful interpretation of it.

Because his deep religious instinct inspires the Hindu always to seek in every aspect of nature a symbol of worship and an attribute of the divine, rather than the means of intellectual distraction or idle amusement, it often seems to the Western materialist that he misses the purpose of art, and is incapable of appreciating the highest æsthetic. It would be more true to say that this is the spirit in which all the greatest works of art have been conceived, and it is just that spirit, still surviving in the East, which is needed to give a new vital impulse to art in modern Europe. There is hardly a form or symbol in Hindu art, from the gods of its pantheon to the primitive jewellery of the peasant, which has not its ultimate derivation in some aspect of nature-worship. It is true that the adoration is addressed not directly to nature, or to the symbol which expresses it, but to the all-pervading spirit which is behind it. But the feeling for beauty is everywhere revealed, even in the epithets bestowed upon the gods, and in the names of ornaments and patterns.

How "the blue-throated, moon-crested Siva" recalls the ethereal beauty of the Himâlayan peaks, with the band of transparent violet-blue just below the snow-cap; and what poetic suggestions underlie the names of the finest Dacca muslins—"running water," "evening dew," and "woven air"!

Is there no love of nature in the reverence for all

[1] "Indian Sculpture and Painting," Plate XLIII.

PLATE XXII



A BULL AT MÂMALLAPURAM

living things, great and small, which is enjoined as a religious duty on every Hindu? Do the people who bestow garlands on every honoured guest, who worship sacred trees, and bring flowers for their daily offerings to the gods, to whom the forest is a temple and every wooded hill-top an altar, not love trees and flowers? If the Indian continually chooses some glorious prospect of mountain, sea, or plain as a fitting place of pilgrimage, and in passionate devotion builds or carves in the living rock a shrine for the image of Him who abides in everything—has he a lower æsthetic sense than the materialist who climbs the mountain-top to see the sunrise, and enjoy his breakfast better?

Did the painters of Ajanta not love the nature and the teeming life of their native land which they depicted with such marvellous skill? Had the sculptors of Ellora who transformed the rocky hill-scarp with their mystic visions of Siva's Himâlayan paradise (Plate XVI.) less delight in beauty than the modern tourist with his camera, and the painter with his sketch-book?

The book-learned Western critic starts with an *à priori* conviction that, because Buddhist and Hindu teachers have always regarded the ascetic life as the highest ideal and the shortest road to salvation, therefore there is ingrained in Indian thought generally a dislike and distrust of nature, incompatible with the aims of art, which have always warped the mind and paralysed the hand of the Indian artist, except when he was influenced by Hellenic traditions. This appears to be the view of Sir George Birdwood, who declares that "sculpture and painting, as fine arts, are unknown in India."[1] He fails to find in Indian art any examples of the "unfettered and

[1] "Industrial Arts of India" (Handbook of the Victoria and Albert Museum), part i. p. 125.

impassioned realisation of the ideals within us, by the things without us"; and recently, in a violent denunciation of Indian sculpture in general, he characterised the Indian conception of Buddha as "a senseless similitude . . . vacuously squinting down its nose to its thumbs and knees and toes. A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity and serenity of soul." [1] The illustrations I have given here and elsewhere of Hindu sculpture appear in his eyes "unshapely, unsightly, and portentous . . . for the most part mechanical bronzes and brasses and the merest Brummagem."

It is a misfortune for India that those who come forward as interpreters of her art to the West should be so constitutionally incapable of appreciating its highest ideals. It seems to me that those who refuse to recognise the intense love of nature with which Hindu thought is penetrated must miss entirely the beauty of the great Hindu poets, of Valmiki and Kalidâsa, as well as the beauty of Hindu art. For all Hindu poetry, music, and art reveal the profound insight into nature and the abiding love for it which have dominated Indian thought throughout its history. They seem, indeed, sometimes to strike notes too high and too deep for Western ears to hear; but this wider range of sense-perception is the special gift of the artist, poet, and musician.

The idea that the soul's salvation can be more speedily won by an ascetic life is, after all, no peculiarity of Hinduism, and the ascetic ideal had no more power to repress the free development of the fine arts in India than the monasticism of the Middle Ages had in Europe. Those who pursued that ideal in daily life were only the smallest fraction of the whole population; generally those whom misfortune, or some great loss or grief, had driven

[1] *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, February 1910.

to seek consolation in retirement from the world. The respect with which they were treated did not prevent others from enjoying the amenities of life in full. Just as in medieval Europe the religious impulse which dominated the masses sought active expression in artistic works, in the building and adornment of innumerable temples, monasteries, rest-houses for pilgrims, bathing tanks, etc., to which they contributed, some by gifts of kind or money, some by their labour, some by dedicating their lives to the temple service. The extraordinary productiveness of Hindu art in its great creative period is sufficient in itself to prove a deep devotion to the study of nature, for creative art can no more proceed from distrust or hatred of nature than music can proceed from an abhorrence of sound.

All art which is not purely eclectic and academic represents the attempt to probe into nature's secrets and relate them to human life and work. Thus all art which is vital and creative is as closely related to the study of nature as all true science and philosophy must always be.

"Puranic" art, or Indian Gothic, which Sir George Birdwood condemns wholesale, is Hindu science and philosophy allegorically interpreted by the great masters of India, in exactly the same way as the great musicians of modern Europe have used popular folk-music as the basis of musical drama. Puranic art is the idiomatic art of India, which hardly became truly Indian until it became Puranic. If it seems strange to Western minds, we should always remember that it was an art language perfectly intelligible to the people to whom it was addressed. It is the complete expression of the Indian consciousness at the height of its greatest intellectual, literary, and artistic activity; and for any critic to affect to despise it is simply to exhibit his incapacity

for approaching Indian art from the Indian point of view.

It is within the province of a critic to ridicule the work of an individual, of a clique, or of a school; but it is presumption to condemn whole centuries of creative art—centuries which are mighty landmarks in the history of a great civilisation. The art of individuals or of cliques may be perverse, but the art of a whole people cannot be wrong. It is a revelation of themselves—a part of the process of their spiritual evolution, and it cannot be wise for the nation which rules India to allow Indian art to be either ignored or misrepresented in its public museums.

According to Sir George Birdwood and most other Anglo-Indian writers, it was first the Greeks and afterwards the Muhammadans who infused into the Indian mind that love of nature which is necessary for the development of "fine art"—a most extraordinary misreading of Indian art-history. There is no phase of Indian art less free and spontaneous than the decadent work of the Gandhara sculptors, and no Hindu canon was ever so blighting in its effect on the higher development of art, or so significant of a distrust and hatred of nature, as the ascetic law of Islam which forbade the representation of any living creature. Not until the rigour of that law was relaxed, when Islam became inspired by the nature-loving traditions of China and Hindustan, did Saracenic art rise to greatness. Both Greeks and Hindus were lovers of beauty. The former loved it for its own sake—for the refinement and abundance of joy which it brings into life; the latter for the intimation it gives of a higher life than this—for life, to the Hindu artist, had a more profound significance than it had to the Greek. The sculptors who carved the great

PLATE XXIII

THE ELEPHANTS AT KANÂRAK

bull at Mâmallapuram and the elephants at Kanârak were as perfect masters of their art as the Greeks. Both the realism of such works as these and the idealism of the sublime Buddha at Anuradhapura, of the four-armed Siva of the Madras Museum (Plates VII. and VIII.), or of the four-headed Brahmâ at Leyden (Plate VI.), proceed from a reverent and profound study of nature, and neither the one nor the other could have been achieved without it.

PLATE XXIV

BAS-RELIEF FROM THE ENTRANCE TO CAVE XIX AT AJANTA

STUDENTS of Indian art are accustomed to think of the Ajanta caves as representing the great epoch of Buddhist painting, but they also furnish some of the most perfect examples of Indian sculpture and architectural design. Among them it would be difficult to find anything to surpass this exquisite sculptured group by the entrance of the most splendid of the chaitya-halls, known as No. XIX.

A Nâgâraja is sitting in the pose known as that of kingly ease, his head canopied by a great seven-headed cobra. His Queen, with a single cobra over her head and holding a lotus-flower in her left hand, is seated by his side; a female attendant stands on his right. The King and Queen are draped in diaphanous garments, the ends of which fall over the roughly hewn seat. Very little is known of these Nâgâ people, serpent-worshippers converted to Buddhism, who figure so frequently in the paintings and sculptures of Ajanta, Amarâvatî, and elsewhere. They adopted the hooded serpent for their tribal ensign. Nâgâ dynasties, says Fergusson, ruled in various parts of Central India and Rajputana from the seventh century B.C. till at least the fourth century A.D. There were also mythical Nâgâ folk, half-human and

PLATE XXIV



BAS-RELIEF, CAVE XIX, AJANTA

half-serpentine in form, who dwelt in the depths of rivers, lakes, and seas, and inhabited Pâtâla, the regions below the earth. They were skilled in all magical arts, and their women were of surpassing loveliness. Many are the legends of their love for mortals, and how they lured them to their wondrous palaces beneath the waters glittering with crystal and gems.

Something of this feeling of mystery is reflected in this Ajanta sculpture, and something of the devotional spirit of Francesca's or Fra Angelico's paintings. The three figures are dominated by an overpowering sense of other-worldliness which fills body and soul and lifts them out of themselves. They might perhaps be listening in rapt attention to the chanting of the monks within the chaitya-hall, seeming to them like echoes of a celestial choir. Or perhaps the sound of many waters coming from the ravine strikes their ears like the voice of the Master whose teaching brought into their lives the fulness of divine content.

There is the same quality and the same degree of technical achievement in this sculpture as in the painting of the mother and child before Buddha in Cave XVII. The genius of the artist is felt through the perfect revelation of his subconscious self rather than by the display of his scientific knowledge, the subjective expression dominating objective realities. In the one case the painter uses a sweeping brush-drawn line so intense and full of vitality that it needs only the slightest complement of colour and tone to perfect the æsthetic creation. Similarly, the sculptor, in concentrating himself upon the spiritual feeling of the subject, uses the boldest effects of chiaroscuro, and reduces all lines and modulations of surface to their simplest forms, so that no superfluous details distract the eye from the essential points of movement and expres-

sion. This does not imply any neglect of technical resources, but rather that supreme power of synthesis which is characteristic of all great art. Both the Indian painter and the sculptor lavish infinite care and skill upon necessary enrichments, such as the jewelled tiara and ornaments, just as the Indian singer will subtly accentuate a phrase with his grace-notes and quarter-tones.

The masterly treatment of the cobra's hood is a striking feature in this sculpture.

PLATE XXV



QUEEN MÂYÂ AND THE INFANT PRINCE SIDDHARTHA

PLATE XXV

QUEEN MÂYÂ AND THE INFANT PRINCE SIDDHARTHA SLEEPING

THIS very remarkable piece of Buddhist sculpture is from the Baro temple in Central India, known as the Gadarmal-ka-Mandi. The temple itself was a medieval structure of about the eleventh century, but it was destroyed and rebuilt a century or two later. The date of the sculpture cannot, however, be determined with any certainty from the age of the building: it probably belonged to a much earlier Buddhist temple or monastery.

In dramatic feeling and wonderfully dignified treatment of his subject this Indian sculptor anticipated the style of the great Florentine masters. There is a grand harmony and repose in the gently undulating lines of Queen Mâyâ, sleeping with her infant pillowed by her side. The beatitude to which she was to attain in the Tusita heavens, seven days after her child's birth, already fills her soul; a presentiment of the blessing and consolation which the Tathâgata was to bring to a suffering world, and of the infinite peace of Nirvana which would end the long cycle of his earthly lives. The rhythmic swell of a calm sea seems to be suggested in the wavy edge of the carpet in which the mother and child are resting.

The four female attendants standing alert by the

Queen's side express perfectly in their attitudes their watchful attention and sense of high responsibility for the great trust committed to their charge. The very expressive figure of the other one who supports with tender solicitude her royal mistress's head rounds off the composition and strikes, as it were, the final chord with a deep note of human feeling.

PLATE XXVI



A BODHISATTVA, JAVA

PLATE XXVI

HEAD OF A BODHISATTVA FROM JAVA

THE original of this plate is preserved in the Glyptotek at Copenhagen; it was brought there from Java, probably from Bôrôbudûr.

Indian Art in Java has a character of its own which distinguishes it from that of the continent from whence it came. There runs through both the same strain of deep serenity, but in the divine ideal of Java we lose the austere feeling which characterises the Hindu sculpture of Elephanta and Mâmallapuram. There is more of human contentment and joy in Indo-Javanese art, an expression of that feeling of peaceful security which the Indian colonists enjoyed in their happy island home, after the centuries of storm and struggle which their forefathers had experienced on the mainland.

This is a head which, for its masterly generalisation of form and line might superficially be labelled Greek, but it is penetrated by a deep religious conviction totally different to that which inspired Hellenic ideals. We can feel that the sculptor in his generalisation was not content with formulating a type of physical perfection. He only used the formal beauty to reveal, as in a mirror, the pure soul of the Bodhisattva; the release from the bondage of intellectual and physical strife; the exaltation of the spirit

that is purified from the dross of worldly desires; the penetration of a mind that sees through the veil of its earthly environment.

It is a face which incarnates the stillness of the depths of ocean; the serenity of an azure, cloudless sky; a beatitude beyond mortal ken. Yet in all its aloofness from human passion there is still some reflection of that divine compassion for struggling humanity which inspired the life and teaching of Sakya Muni.

PLATE XXVII



THE "LINGA" SHRINE, ELEPHANTA

PLATE XXVII

THE "LINGA" SHRINE OF THE GREAT TEMPLE OF ELEPHANTA, BOMBAY

THE inner shrine, or *garbha*, of the great rock-cut temple of Elephanta contains the *lingam*, Siva's emblem, symbolising the reproductive powers of nature. The shrine itself, approximately cubical in form, symbolises the earth. It has four entrances, facing east, west, north, and south, each of which is guarded by two colossal figures, now badly mutilated, representing the protecting genii of the four cardinal and intermediate points. These majestic figures, each about fifteen feet in height, are among the finest sculptures at Elephanta. Equally noble in design are the massive columns which support the huge weights of the superincumbent rock. Their gourd-shaped capitals are similar to the so-called *amâlika* which crowns the curved spire of Hindu temples, and is probably derived from the fruit of the lotus-flower. The latter, as Count D'Alviella remarks,[1] symbolises less the sun itself than the solar matrix, the mysterious sanctuary into which the sun retires every evening, there to acquire fresh life.

[1] "Migration of Symbols," p. 28.

PLATES XXVIII AND XXIX

SIVA NÂTARÂJA, OR NATÊSA, LORD OF DANCERS

The magnificent fragment from Elephanta shown in Plate XXVIII. is the prototype of the South Indian bronzes of Siva as Nâtarâja, illustrated in Chapter V. (Plates VII. and VIII.). Even in its present mutilated condition it is an embodiment of titanic power, a majestic conception of the Deity who for His pleasure sets the worlds innumerable in motion. Though the rock itself seems to vibrate with the rhythmic movement of the dance, the noble head bears the same look of serene calm and dispassion which illuminates the face of the Buddha. It belongs to the most virile period of Hindu sculpture, *i.e.* from the sixth to the eighth centuries, and in technical achievement marks its highest development. Like all the Elephanta sculptures, it was mutilated by Portuguese buccaneers in the sixteenth century, and has suffered much from subsequent neglect and vandalism.

The sculpture of the same subject from the Ravana-ka-kai Cave at Ellora, Plate XXIX., must belong to a somewhat later date. It is more florid in style and less accomplished in technique, though not less strong and expressive in its movement; and fortunately it has suffered less from mutilation than its great Elephanta prototype.

One of the charges which unsympathetic and uninformed critics frequently bring against Indian art is its want of originality in the unvarying repetition of traditional

PLATE XXVIII



SIVA DANCING THE TÂNDAVAN, ELEPHANTA

SIVA DANCING THE TÂNDAVAN, ELLORA

types. It is true that Indian artists, like the great masters of the West, always expressed themselves in the forms and conventions of artistic tradition—the art-language of the race. But it only shows ignorance of the subject to assert that they have always lacked creative power. In the great period of Indian sculpture, before the Muhammadan invasion, which is just that with which most European critics are least acquainted, it is only necessary to compare the different artistic developments which belong to different localities and different times to recognise that, in the treatment of traditional subjects, the individuality of the Indian artist always strongly asserts itself.

It will be obvious, in the case of these two typical examples of the same subject, only slightly varied in general lines and disposition of masses, how individual each one is in artistic expression, and how much they explain the religious atmosphere of the schools to which they belong.

The Elephanta sculpture reflects the lofty idealism and intellectuality of the Upanishads. At Ellora we feel more of the spirit of medieval priestcraft, with all its ritualistic pageantry and superstitious emotionalism. It shows us the corrupt state of Hinduism at the time when the great reformer Sankaracharya began his mission. Here Siva, with the hissing cobra as a girdle, and the grim skeleton of Death lurking behind him, is only the terrible Destroyer rejoicing in the dissolution of the worlds.

PLATES XXX AND XXXI

UPPER PART OF ROCK-CUT TEMPLE AT KALUGUMALAI, TINNEVELLY DISTRICT—TEMPLE OF RÂJARÂNÎ (CIRCA A.D. 1000) AT BHUVANESHWAR, PURÎ: PART OF THE WESTERN FAÇADE

THE latest of the series of Dravidian rock-cut temples is in the extreme south of Madras, in the Tinnevelly district, at Kalugumalai. It has been dated by Fergusson at about the tenth or eleventh century, but from the style of the sculpture I am inclined to think this is a century too late. From an architectural point of view he rightly observes that, had it been finished, it would have been one of the most perfect gems of the style. From the sculptor's point of view no such qualifications need be made: the fact that it is unfinished rather adds to its interest.

Though the design is strictly architectural in form, it belongs technically entirely to the plastic or glyptic form of art, and the human figure plays as important a part in it as it does in many masterpieces of Renaissance monumental sculpture. Very few critics will refuse to admit the extraordinary technical skill displayed in planning out and carving a complex form of such dimensions from a ridge of granite rock. There are some, however, who would deny the existence of any scientific or intellectual basis in Eastern art. A writer in *The*

PLATE XXX



ROOF OF MONOLITHIC TEMPLE AT KALUGUMALAI

Edinburgh Review, in an article on "Eastern Art and Western Critics,"[1] asserts that "every kind of manifestation, scientific, political, literary, of order, discipline, and coherence will be looked for in Eastern life in vain"—his impressions of Eastern life being derived from three years passed among the Tamil coolies and Cingalese villagers of Ceylon. "It would be easy to show," he affirms, "that Western civilisation, Western knowledge and science and thought and literature, and also Western politics and government and methods of colonising and ruling—in short, the Western influence in all its effects—has been of a distinctly intellectual and rational quality, and has been closely identified with the establishment of order, discipline, coherence—in a word, with the vindication in all things of the principle of form": his thesis being that the intellectual West has, in the domain of art, spoken in terms of form, the emotional East in terms of colour.

The distinction he draws is a wholly imaginary one. Even in pictorial art the Oriental has always relied upon line rather than upon colour, as a means of self-expression; and line, if it expresses anything, expresses form. Colour was always used by the great artists of the East as a subordinate instrument, to accentuate and develop the forms which the line expressed.

Again, Indian art, in its greatest achievements, is more concerned with sculpture and architecture than with painting. How, then, does this colour-theory apply to it, more than to Greek sculpture and architecture?

It is, in fact, difficult to draw a hard-and-fast distinction between Western and Eastern art, because there have been periods in which the West has gone over to the East, and *vice-versâ*. But, in the true Eastern ideal,

[1] No. 344, October 1910.

form is used merely as a vehicle for self-realisation. The West, more idolatrous than the East, often regards the realisation of form as the end of art.

The idea of Indian art as a nebulous, chaotic mass of glowing colour, charged with emotion, may give a sufficiently clear indication of the critic's Eastern impressions, but his sweeping generalisations will be astonishing to any one who has realised how deeply all Indian life and culture, even to the lowest strata, have been permeated by the teachings of the philosophical schools. It was the work of the great universities of Northern India to coordinate the artistic traditions of the heterogeneous racial elements which composed Indian society at that time, to rationalise them and use them for the interpretation of the esoteric teachings of philosophy and religion. The men who created Indian art were not, as the Western academic critic assumes, of an inferior intellectual calibre to the poets, philosophers, and religious teachers; for art was not then, as it is now, a specialised study divorced from religion and ignored by the universities. It was an integral part of national life and thought. To assert that Indian art has failed to interpret Indian thought is a contradiction in terms: for no art can live for more than twenty centuries which fails to express the intellectuality of a people. But there are evidently still some critics who, like Macaulay, refuse to admit the intelligence of Eastern races: who, because Indian art seems to them obscure, will deny that it satisfactorily expresses what its creators intended.

It is a common view of Indian art to regard it as undisciplined, incoherent, and without any intellectual foundation; an assumption only proceeding from our profound ignorance of all aspects of Indian culture, of its history and scientific principles.

We still cling foolishly and arrogantly to the belief that, by totally ignoring the living traditions of Indian art, and by teaching Indian students anatomy, perspective, "model drawing," and the orders of classic architecture, we are fulfilling our intellectual mission in the East; and this we do in sublime ignorance of the fact that Indian art has its scientific principles and laws of form as clear, precise, and intelligent as the æsthetic formularies of Greece, or as the grammar and syntax of its classical language, Sanskrit.

The assumed antagonism between the root principles of Hellenic art and Indian comes, to a large extent, from our modern empirical methods of applying them. It is open to question how far our admiration for Greek art is based upon a deep intuitive sympathy for the highest æsthetic qualities which the Greeks themselves admired and strove to realise, and how far it is influenced by inherited tendencies towards Puritanical plainness and whitewash, by academic prepossessions of the mind inculcated by generations of classical schoolmasters, and by pride in the belief that the mechanism of the Greek æsthetic is known to us and can be applied by ourselves with such facility as modern European art and architecture indicate.

It is easy to imagine what an uproar there would be if some mischievous sprite with a magic wand were suddenly to restore the Elgin marbles in the British Museum to their pristine condition, give to the classical statues which originally had it the final coat of coloured wax (which to the Greeks represented an art higher than that of the sculptor), and added to the model of the Parthenon all the richness of its painted decoration which it had in the days of Pericles. How classical scholars and critics would blaspheme and denounce the emotional barbarians

who dared to desecrate the purity and intellectuality of the art of Hellas with an oriental paint-pot! Their classical ideal would be lowered to the level of an Indian pagoda! Certainly it is the limitations, rather than the merits, of Greek art, its simplicity rather than its nobility and refinement, which make it appeal so strongly to the man in the street, the building contractor, and the amateur artist or architect. And it is equally certain that, while very few Western critics have gained their knowledge of Indian art at first hand, the recognised exponents of it, unconscious of their own limitations, have been its chief detractors.

The Greeks themselves, I have no doubt, would have scoffed at academic distinctions between "fine" art and "decorative": they would have given unstinted praise to the sculpture at Kalugumalai, and recognised in the Sun-temple at Mudherâ, in Gujerat, an art not less perfect than their own. Nor would they have denied the intellectuality in the decorative scheme in Plate XXXI., from the Râjarânî temple at Bhuvaneshwar, in Orissa. What their comments would be on the "classical" art which we substitute for Indian in Calcutta public buildings may well be imagined.

If Greece, at the time of her greatest artistic development, had established a permanent empire in India, and all the wealth of Indian nature, with its infinite suggestions, had been revealed to her mind; if Vedic culture had been added to the philosophy of Pythagoras and Plato; I cannot conceive that Indian art would have taken a very different course to that which it actually followed. It is impossible to believe that Greek æsthetic thought would not in such a case have responded to the influence of its environment, as art in its very nature must do; that her architecture would not then have reflected some-

PLATE XXXI



TEMPLE OF RÂJARÂNÎ, BHUVANESHWAR

thing of the wild grandeur of the tropical forest, as well as the trim beauty of the olive and cypress grove; and that, with a wider experience of life, the sculpture of her pantheon would not have acquired a more profound metaphysic than that represented by the gods and goddesses of the Parthenon.

After all, invidious comparisons between different schools of artistic thought are altogether unprofitable. It is futile to discuss whether the lily be more beautiful than the rose; and if intellectuality were the only quality in art, the most perfect æsthetic might be found in a correct solution to a problem in compound proportion. The real issue, which my critics persistently evade or try to confuse, is not an academic one—whether from an intellectual standpoint Indian art should or should not seem great in Western eyes—but a practical and vital one, whether, because we think our own art finer, we are justified in exterminating that which belongs to Indian civilisation. Does a good gardener, because he loves the lilies best, uproot all the roses? In India we propagate the weeds, and let the roses die.

The absorbing interest of Indian art, to all artists in the West, must always lie not so much in the magnificence of its ancient monuments as in the fact that such exquisite art as that of the Râjarânî temple, unapproached by any Western architectural sculpture of modern times, represents a living tradition still practised by large numbers of Indian craftsmen. If there were any sound artistic or scientific principles in our educational methods, India would need no schools to stimulate such a grand tradition into new life: or even if we would leave things alone, and not pretend to teach, Indian art would still be better off.

The folly of the present departmental system is that,

with such a tradition still alive, with numbers of such master craftsmen still obtainable, we allow Indian revenues to be spent in producing mechanical imitations of Gothic or Renaissance sculpture at ten or twenty times the cost of good Indian art; and this, forsooth, because some Western doctrinaires believe that Indian sculpture is not "fine"!

PLATE XXXII



PILLAR IN THE SIVA TEMPLE, VELLORE

PLATE XXXII

A CARVED PILLAR INSIDE THE SIVA TEMPLE (KALYANA MANDAPA) VELLORE, MADRAS

THIS is a superb example of Dravidian architectural sculpture attributed to the middle of the fourteenth century. Essentially Gothic in feeling, it will bear comparison with the best work of the cathedral craftsmen of medieval Europe. Dravidian art reflects the wild luxuriance and mysterious beauty of those dense jungles of Southern India, haunted by *rakshasas* and fearsome beasts, through which Râma and his faithful monkey allies forced their way to rescue Sîtâ from her prison in the stronghold of the demon-king, Ravana.

In the wonderful pillared halls attached to the temples of Southern India is concentrated, as it were, the essence of the beauty of a tropical forest, perfectly ordered to fulfil architectonic and æsthetic purposes. No one who has not seen them can have any conception of their great beauty and perfect art.

It is, of course, a defect inherent in the quality of art such as this, that in its romantic imaginativeness and the energy of its creative power it has a tendency to become sometimes incoherent, and to lose the sense of co-ordination and æsthetic unity. But this is only to say that all art in its decadence converts its own merit into an offence, just as a beautiful body from which life has departed

begins to putrefy. One might just as well blame Nature herself, and say that her tropical moods cannot inspire great art, as charge Indian sculpture generally with incoherency.

It is only because Indian sculpture is solely judged in England from the few fragments promiscuously thrown together at South Kensington and the British Museum that a keen and cultured art critic like Mr. Roger Fry can write of the difficulties of an approach to the understanding of Indian art as follows: "It is rather the curious incoherence—for to us it appears such—of Indian sculpture, its want of any large co-ordination, of any sense of relative scale. In its choice of relief and of the scale of ornament it appears without any principle. It is like a rococo style deprived of the lightness and elegance which alone make that style tolerable. Such a treatment implies for our minds a fundamental conflict between the notion and its expression; for these heavily ornate reliefs—one cannot but have in mind the Amarâvatî sculptures of the British Museum—are intended apparently to convey notions of grave religious import, and such ideas are for us inevitably connected with a certain type of line, with a certain austerity in the treatment of a design, with large unperturbed surfaces or great and clearly united sequences of plane."[1]

Such criticism may be perfectly just as applied to the particular instance cited; the error lies in taking the Amarâvatî sculptures as typical of the best Indian art. Even in this case it is necessary to remember that these reliefs were originally painted, and the total effect of them, *in situ*, in the brilliant Indian sunshine, can hardly be judged in their present position on the staircase of the British Museum.

[1] *Quarterly Review*, January 1910.

INDEX

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